

Edinburgh College Strategic Framework and single parent experiences of Further Education

Submission to consultation from
Edinburgh College on its draft
strategic framework¹

29 July 2022



**One Parent
Families Scotland**
changing lives, challenging poverty

¹ <https://www.edinburghcollege.ac.uk/media/qutbqnkv/edinburgh-college-strategic-framework-2022.pdf>

1. What are your thoughts on our ambition, values, purpose and three strategic themes (People, Place, Performance)?

One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) is the leading charity working with single parent families in Scotland. We provide expert advice, practical support and campaign with parents to make their voices heard to change the systems, policies and attitudes that disadvantage single parent families.

Our mission is to work with and for single parent families, providing support services that enable them to achieve their potential and help create lasting solutions to the poverty and barriers facing many single parents and their children.

As such we are particularly interested in the strategic theme 'people'.

Single parents face significant barriers to entering, remaining and succeeding in Further Education. In 2019, there were 144,000 lone-parent families with dependent children in Scotland (around 25% of all families with children).

A number of the points outlined in the Strategic Framework under 'Goals – People' would help to break down some of these barriers, if implemented with the experiences and needs of single parents in mind.

For example:

The point about "Delivering a learner journey which secures positive destinations for our students, supported by ... student wellbeing, financial support and support for learning" is very important for single parents.

Single parents are significantly more likely to be living in poverty (39% of children in single parent families are in poverty), are disproportionately lower qualified than other groups, and of those in employment (60 per cent), over two-thirds enter the lowest paid occupations.

Ensuring financial support is both in place and clearly advertised and accessible to students and applicants is essential to enabling more single parents to enter Further Education.

Some of the key issues raised with us by single parents about barriers to education are a lack of knowledge and information about where to start, funding available, choosing the correct course, and the financial impacts that entering education will have for them, including the impact on benefits.

Support for learning and wellbeing support are also key issues, as many single parents will have been out of education for a longer period of time. Parents have told us that having support such as classes in confidence building, essay writing skills and study/research skills, peer mentors, and opportunities to learn in smaller groups would help them to succeed in Further Education.

Many single parents face significant stress around caring for a child alone, often with a low income. Balancing this with education can be challenging for parents' mental wellbeing, and therefore support around this is also essential.

As such, the point about "Ensuring staff and students' views, experience and knowledge inform how we embed agile working practices. Evolving our workplace health and wellbeing strategy, 'EC Cares'" is also important for single parents.

For single parents, 'agile working' should include flexibility to account for childcare needs and understanding of responsibilities of parents like dropping children at nursery.

Something which is missing from the "people" focused goals is a specific reference to the groups who may face specific barriers in education, such as single parents and those with disabilities. In order to respond effectively to those barriers, we would recommend a specific reference to the groups the College will be making concerted efforts to include in its learning environment.

While there is a point about "Creating an inclusive, diverse and people-oriented environment where all staff are appropriately challenged and are able to balance work and life commitments," this appears to be focused on staff rather than students.

2. How do you/does your organisation interact and work with the College? What currently works well?

OPFS has had sporadic contact with Edinburgh College, but would welcome the opportunity to work in partnership to more effectively address the needs of single parent learners.

3. What more do you think we could be doing to deliver our six goals of:

- Delivering a superb student experience
- Being an inspirational, resilient and supportive place to work
- Delivering outstanding support to businesses
- Delivering successful and transformational collaborations
- Growing and extending our impact and being agile and adaptable
- Enhancing our digital performance

Focusing particularly on “delivering a superb student experience”, we would recommend taking greater consideration of the barriers faced by single parents such as those outlined in question 1.

Additionally, for single parents in particular, a lack of flexible, affordable childcare is a major barrier to Further Education. Parents with young children find it easier to attend college if their child can access an onsite nursery. These places are taken up very quickly, and the allocation of college childcare funds can be quickly allocated.

We would recommend including the College’s provision of childcare funding within the Strategic Framework, and any other steps the College intends to take to support those with childcare commitments (this could be a reference to a more substantive document with more details on this).

We recommend that this also include the provision of on-site nursery places, that open before class start time to allow students to have affordable, practical childcare and able to see their child during breaks.

We would also recommend that the College advertise and promote specialist advice and support services like One Parent Families Scotland. Our national Advice and Information service includes single parent tailored advice, which could be beneficial to students who may not get right advice from Jobcentre Plus. Single parent's situation around benefits and student income is very complicated, and so the more accurate advice as parents can be offered around this the better.

Under 'Place', one of the points listed is: "Continuing to play a leading role as a key contributor to delivering on local and Scottish Government economic strategies, including priorities such as digital, tackling poverty, future skills, innovation and inward investment, and health and wellbeing."

Making college more accessible to single parents in Edinburgh should be seen as playing a key role in tackling the disproportionate levels of poverty experienced by single parents and their children. Single parent families are one of the six priority groups in the Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan and are included in the Child Poverty Act (2017).

Single parents with lower qualifications struggle to get on in the labour market; they overwhelmingly work in the lowest paid occupational groups, are more likely to work short hours or part-time jobs, and their opportunities for progression are curtailed. Single parents need access to further education that will open the door to employment in higher paid occupational groups.

4. What are your views on our key performance indicators?

On the item "Greater diversity within our student and staff population", we would recommend more specificity on which groups are currently under-represented, with a commitment to enable greater representation of those groups. We recommend that this includes single parents, in light of the barriers currently faced by this group in education.



One Parent Families Scotland

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If you have any questions about anything in this report, please contact us at:

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