

Annual Engagement Visit Report

UHI Perth

18 April 2023

College Principal	Dr Margaret Cook
Annual Engagement Visit Date	11 January 2023
College Nominee	Catherine Etri
Lead HMI	Joe Mulholland

1. Background

Annual Engagement Visits (AEVs) are planned collaboratively between the college, HM Inspectors and Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

During the AEV, a team of HM Inspectors evaluated progress made by the college towards its improvement priorities and outcomes of previous engagement with HM Inspectors. During the visit, the team met with staff, learners and other stakeholders and explored the following overarching themes linked to the college's enhancement plan and priorities around COVID-19 recovery: learner recruitment; retention; attainment; and progression. The data referred to throughout this report relates to academic year 2020/2021.

This report summarises the findings from the visit and highlights areas of positive progress, areas for development, and any associated main points for action. The report will be shared with the college Principal, college Board of Management, and/or the Regional Strategic Body, and SFC. An accompanying short report will be published on Education Scotland's website.

2. The college and its context

UHI Perth is an academic partner within the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI). The college works in partnership with local and regional stakeholders to offer provision to meet the skills needs of both Tayside and the wider UHI region.

The college employs over 500 members of staff and offers a broad curriculum with access to study at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels 2 to 12. The college also delivers a range of Modern Apprenticeship programmes supported by Skills Development Scotland (SDS), industry bodies and employers. School-college partnership provision includes Foundation Apprenticeships in business, creative and digital media, early years, engineering and health care.

The college is currently undertaking a curriculum review, reflecting on a number of national priorities and inform the development of a new curriculum strategy to ensure the curriculum meets the needs of local, regional, and national priorities.

3. Summary of findings

3.1 Recruitment

Areas of positive progress

Learner progress and outcomes

- Staff in all curriculum teams have autonomy to develop the most appropriate recruitment strategies to suit the needs of their potential learners. The use of contextualised arrangements is helping to maintain recruitment levels that are in line with college targets.
- Staff ensure that the existing core skill levels of all further education (FE) learners are assessed on entry. This helps curriculum teams to ensure that individual learners receive the right level of support from the start of their programme.

Curriculum, learning, teaching, and assessment

- Almost all learners are satisfied with the information they receive during recruitment. They feel well informed about their options and choices.

Services to support learning

- Staff in most curriculum and support teams provide learners with useful and well-planned support as part of 'get ready for college' activities. This provides learners with valuable opportunities to get to know their peers, members of college staff and become familiar with the facilities and resources.

Learner engagement

- College staff work well with eleven local secondary schools to offer taster sessions and open days. Engaging with schools is supporting school-age learners to make informed choices about their college programme.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

- Curriculum staff gain useful insight and understanding of industry needs through employer events, labour market Intelligence (LMI) reports and feedback from awarding bodies. They use this information well to develop programmes that prepare learners to transition into employment.

Areas for development

- Information and support for learners regarding how to access digital devices prior to the start of their programme is not yet consistent. The majority of learners found the process confusing.

- Most returning learners indicated that their induction programme had been a repeat of a previous year. They would welcome a more bespoke induction programme that is tailored to their needs. They describe the current arrangements as not helpful as many aspects covered are already well known to them.

3.2 Retention

Areas of positive progress

Learner progress and outcomes

- The overall rate of withdrawal for full-time FE programmes is 2% lower than the sector norm.
- All Personal Academic Tutors (PATs) use well developed induction arrangements to provide helpful guidance and support for learners at the beginning of their programme. Early identification of learner support needs allows PATs to create individualised interventions to support learner retention.

Curriculum, learning, teaching, and assessment

- Staff in most curriculum areas collaborate constructively with a range of external partners to provide placement opportunities for young people. This allows learners to experience the world of work in their chosen subject field and relate their learning to industry.
- All PATs respond quickly and supportively when learners have issues that may impact their learning. They communicate support needs to curriculum teams in a sensitive way to meet learner needs and promote retention.

Services to support learning

- The Technology Support Team offers a helpful digital hardware loan scheme and provides skilful support for those learners with digital software problems. This allows learners the opportunity to fully participate and progress on their programme.
- The Funding Team supports learners proactively who are at risk of leaving their programme early due to financial challenges. The support available includes foodbank vouchers, and signposting of additional funding sources.
- College support services support learners to access counselling services online, by telephone or in person. Options for health and wellbeing support are highly visible to learners and encourage learners to seek help when needed.

Learner engagement

- All teaching staff track learner progress efficiently and identify those at risk of withdrawal during fortnightly meetings. Interventions and good communication between staff ensure learners receive the support they require to progress with their programme.
- College support teams provide free breakfasts for all learners. This supports their wellbeing and encourages learners to enjoy social interaction with other learners.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

- The participation rate for learners in the SFC Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey has improved and is 10% above the sector norm. Almost all learners who responded reported that they were satisfied with their college experience.

Areas for development

- The overall withdrawal rate for part-time FE programmes has increased and is 2% higher than the sector norm.

3.3 Attainment

Areas of positive progress

Learner progress and outcomes

- The overall rate of full-time FE learner attainment is high and is 2% above the sector norm.

Curriculum, learning, teaching, and assessment

- All curriculum areas have retained some positive aspects of developments introduced during the pandemic. This includes the use of recorded lessons to help learners to revise or catch up and maintain progress.
- Staff in all curriculum areas use alternative assessment arrangements effectively. Staff adjust assessment delivery to meet individual learner needs and circumstances and support attainment.

Services to support learning

- Curriculum directors maintain oversight of self-evaluation arrangements to support improvement in programme performance. This standardised approach supports the sharing of positive practice across all curriculum staff.

Learner engagement

- All curriculum teams work collaboratively with learners to discuss and agree how programmes are delivered including the use of hybrid delivery approaches.

- Learner progress based on attendance and attainment is monitored regularly through a helpful tracking approach. Teaching staff have access to learner records online, and act swiftly to inform PATs when intervention is required with individual learners. This is supporting improvement in retention and attainment.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

- Almost all teaching staff make good use of opportunities to enhance their learning and teaching practice. This includes a range of initiatives such as: engagement with industry speakers, placements in industry, lesson observations and working with industry awarding bodies. This allows teaching staff to contextualise lesson delivery and help deliver the skills required for employment.
- All college managers and staff systematically and continuously review their curriculum provision. This includes fortnightly curriculum team meetings, regular learner forums and curriculum team reviews. This allows teaching teams and managers to make necessary changes to support learners to achieve.

Areas for development

- The majority of learners describe receiving too many college emails and that this can lead to important messages being missed, for example regarding progression opportunities.
- Around one third of programmes do not have a course representative in place and the majority of course representatives have not received sufficient training to undertake their role. This is impacting on the consistent collection and use of learner views to inform improvement.

3.4 Progression

Areas of positive progress

Learner progress and outcomes

- Staff in all curriculum areas provide almost all learners with a range of employment or further study opportunities. Most learners enter a positive destination on leaving college.

Curriculum, learning, teaching, and assessment

- Staff in all curriculum areas have good partnership arrangements in place with employers, schools, and the local authority. They design the curriculum carefully to provide learners with suitable progression pathways.

Services to support learning

- The Careers Guidance Team support learners with planning for next steps in learning or into employment, including help with UCAS applications and useful careers advice drop-in sessions.

Learner engagement

- Meta skills are embedded across most curriculum areas. Development of these skills encourages learners to enhance their employability skills and increase employment opportunities.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

- Senior managers encourage all staff in curriculum teams to use autonomy to develop their programmes and plan effectively for future developments. This has created a culture of ownership amongst staff that supports progression to further study with a strong industry focus.

Area for development

- The number of full-time FE learners entering a positive destination has decreased significantly. The number of learners who have an unconfirmed destination has increased.

4. Main Points for Action

- There are no main points for action.

5. What happens next?

We are confident that the college has made satisfactory progress and has the capacity to continue to improve. We will continue to monitor progress with regular contact through the link HM Inspector.

Joe Mulholland
HM Inspector