

College Progress Visit Report

Perth College UHI

9 February 2022

College Principal	Dr Margaret Cook
Progress Visit (PV) Date	16 December 2021
College Nominee	Catherine Etri
Lead Inspector	Barbara Nelson
College HMI	Andrew Brawley
Outcome of Progress Visit	Satisfactory Progress

Purpose of the progress visit

PVs are planned collaboratively between the college, Education Scotland and SFC. The team carrying out the PV engages with staff, learners and other stakeholders and produce a summary report for each college, which will be shared with the principal, college Regional Board and/or college Board of Management.

Overall judgement regarding progress

At the end of the PV, HM Inspectors of Education, Associate Assessors and Student Team Members review the evidence gathered during their discussions with college managers, staff, learners and stakeholders. They assess the progress that colleges have made against their Action Plans, taking account of any changes to local circumstances. Based on this evidence, the team will form a view as to whether the college has made satisfactory progress against its Action Plans or has not made satisfactory progress. This outcome is contained within this report with accompanying commentary to support the findings.

The PV for Perth College UHI explored five overarching themes linked to the college's enhancement plan and priorities around Covid-19 recovery. The themes are:

- Curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment;
- Services to support learning;
- Learner engagement;
- Evaluation to facilitate improvement; and
- Learner progress and outcomes.

Background and context

The college and its context

Perth College UHI is the largest academic partner in the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) and delivers 20% of the Highlands and Islands region's further education (FE) provision. The college delivers around 26,000 Scottish Funding Council (SFC) credits of activity each year as part of its allocation from the UHI Strategic Regional Body.

The College delivers a full range of further education (FE) and higher education (HE) programmes from Scottish Credit Qualification Framework (SCQF) Level 2 to level 12. Full-time FE represents 78% of credits and 29% of enrolments (at 2019-20). Part-time FE represents 22% of credits, and 71% of funded enrolments.

The college works with a range of partners and stakeholders in its local community, particularly through its partnership with local schools to delivery Senior Phase opportunities for young people. Perth College is a key partner in the delivery of the ambitious vision and strategy for Perth and Kinross through the Community Plan and the Perth City Plan.

Findings from the progress visit

Curriculum, learning and teaching and assessment

Areas of positive progress

- Managers and staff have a shared vision and collective ownership of learning and teaching. This is impacting positively on the learner experience, enhancing staff skills and helping to develop the culture of the college and improve the learner experience.
- During the pandemic, most college programmes have been delivered using a hybrid delivery approach, with SCQF level 4 and 5 learners in college full time alongside remote delivery for other learners. This approach supports learners who find remote learning challenging to access more focused support and engage better in lessons. Teaching staff provide practical resources to enable learners to study remotely. This approach is working well and leading to improved levels of engagement by learners.
- The college has continued to develop its approach to observation of learning and teaching. The move from a predominantly peer-to-peer approach to arrangements based on the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) standards and the UHI Enhancement Values is ensuring that all staff, including new staff, have access to ongoing Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL). This is helpful in developing the pedagogical skills of staff and the skills required to support on-line learning.
- Personal Academic Tutors (PATs) played a pivotal role in supporting learners to adjust to online delivery and to identify specific needs and ensure appropriate training. This enabled learners to access learning and support through the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) *Brightspace*. Highlands and Islands Student Association (HISA) supported learners to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the VLE from a learner perspective. The action plan developed as a result has been valuable in determining how to enhance the platform by building on strengths and addressing areas for improvement.
- College staff responded very well to the challenges of the UHI-wide cyber incident in March 2021. They demonstrated high levels of resilience and a willingness to work collaboratively to ensure continuation of services. The incident impacted access to all learner services and information and resulted in additional workloads for both teaching and service delivery staff.
- All curriculum teams made significant changes to their assessment processes and made adjustments in line with assessment protocols and the requirements of qualification agencies. These included changes to closed-book from open book assessments which are now located on the college VLE. Learners were supported well to use these remotely. This influenced curriculum scheduling, particularly for practical courses, where teams responded innovatively to capturing evidence which included time-lapse photography, social networks and video. Staff told us the VLE was particularly effective in providing engaging tools for formative assessment. Learners describe receiving helpful feedback from online learning which supported them to target learning and progress their learning well.
- All staff are very mindful of the importance of ensuring that learner induction sets out clearly for learners the expectations of the programme alongside the support available to them,

including access to digital resources. Staff have focused on ensuring relationships were established and learners are confident in reaching out for support.

- Teaching staff have developed enhanced digital skills and understanding as a result of professional learning undertaken during the pandemic. The college's VLE promotes inclusive practice to support teaching staff when developing learning materials. It identifies where material is not accessible and uses software to verify inclusive content. Teaching staff make appropriate adjustments to teaching approaches and session length to take into account access to remote learning. They make good use of quizzes, breakout rooms, and the MS Teams chat function to keep learners engaged and motivated.
- A well-considered college Creative and Engaging Learning and Teaching (CELT) programme supports both new and experienced staff to develop and share best practice approaches, for. It also includes a 6 week online course to support teaching approaches. This is impacting positively in raising skill levels for teaching staff for a hybrid model of delivery.
- The college works very well with eight local secondary schools to support transition from school to college learning platforms through the provision of digital devices and associated training in their use. As a result of the pandemic, some school provision is now taught exclusively online alongside class talks and parental engagement sessions. Practical provision is taught at college in workshops and this works well for learners. These arrangements support school partnerships well by ensuring the continuation of senior phase learning and engagement with college courses.

Area for further progress and actions required

- Staff are working hard to take account of the current challenges of learning delivery and adhering to guidelines. This need to respond to constantly changing priorities is impacting on staff time and capacity to reflect fully on their experience and plan for a different future for learning.

Services to support learning

Areas of positive progress

- Support Services staff worked collegiately to resource and equip staff quickly to work from home and provide a continuation of service for learners throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. There has been effective migration to remote delivery of the full support service delivery and this has contributed positively to the college's learner retention rates.
- The college has developed strong and mutually respectful partnerships, to build capacity around services, with a range of external agencies. This is supporting learners and staff to be signposted to the appropriate support timeously.
- The college invested in counsellors who are qualified to deliver online counselling prior to the pandemic and this has ensured the continuation of service to all identified learners and staff. The college has increased the capacity for this service and this has resulted in shorter waiting times. The migration to a partially online delivery model supports flexible access for learners.

- Staff have benefitted from support delivered by Brightspace Champions and ICT support tutors. They are supported well to acquire ICT skills and enhance their teaching approaches and learning experiences. They speak very positively of internal training sessions and support received.
- Support services staff, alongside a specialist curriculum team, have a raised awareness of the needs of learners with Additional Support Needs (ASN). They have engaged well with parents/carers and learners to support delivery and maintain engagement. There are effective arrangements to support learners with identified needs to receive assistance on their programmes. Learning mentors and wellbeing and support officers provide further targeted on-course support for entry and introductory level learners or those with additional needs to help them cope with their studies. They also provide one-to-one and online support to help develop learners' confidence and understanding.
- College careers advisers provide support for learners to inform pathway choices. They provide focused interviews with learners, provide input on their services during induction events, attend career days and deliver a range of employability workshops. They often link into Personal Development Planning (PDP) units delivered within programmes. This is supporting learners to enter college programmes and make the transition to higher level programmes effectively.
- College managers share the results of in-house resilience research with staff. This knowledge was used to support staff understanding of their wrap-around service and the importance that each individual had to play in ensuring learners were targeted and directed to the most appropriate source of support. As a result there are improved levels of team work across all staff in the college and the service to learners. Staff acknowledge there are now improved levels of sharing of information between staff to support individual learners.

Area for further progress and actions required

- There are no areas for development identified.

Learner engagement

Areas of positive progress

- Perth College Student Association (HISA Perth) is fully represented across all the associated committees and their contribution to meetings is highly valued by staff and board members.
- Most class groups have a Student Voice Representative (SVR) to represent their views. The SVRs receive Student Partnership in Quality Scotland (*sparqs*) training and cooperate well with HISA, and course teams, by sharing learner views covering all aspects of learner experience. They also feedback directly to HISA Perth at the Student Representation Committee (SRC), which meets every 6 weeks. Staff and learners recognise the value of this regular feedback and action plan for improvement. SVRs provide a useful forum for learners to express their views and concerns about their programme. They support learners to complete college surveys, and discuss issues with PATs or members of HISA for resolution
- All students can feedback at the Learner Voice Forum, which is held at least twice a year and chaired by a college managers. Feedback is highly valued by both managers and learners,

and appropriate actions are taken.

- The college has developed a survey dashboard which provides access to helpful data and analysis including trends over time in of learner participation and overall satisfaction. This facilitates well course team evaluation for student satisfaction rates
- Student engagement officers work with learners to improve engagement by online tools to support social engagement. The use of blogs and an online social space enabled learners to connect with each other more informally and maintain relationships with their peers during remote learning.

Area for further progress and actions required

- Whilst response rates to learner surveys including the SFC Early Satisfaction Survey (ESS) and the College Early Student Experience Survey (ESES) has increased in recent years, overall participation is low with too few learners expressing their views.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

Areas of positive progress

- The college has adjusted its priorities and targets in response to COVID-19. Previous targets have been modified accordingly and the college has made significant progress in achieving these.
- The college has in place a comprehensive and effective self-evaluation process which involves almost all staff and learners. It draws effectively on learner analytics and data to validate outcomes and actions. Actions are monitored at all levels of management and this supporting change and improving outcome for learners and staff. Actions are collated centrally and emerging themes discussed at various committees to ensure all leaders are aware of these priorities. However, there are areas of duplication in the process?
- CLPL is well informed by the Personal Development and Review (PDR) process and self-evaluation. This is impacting positively on the improvement of skills for staff in delivering the curriculum. Staff value and are motivated by the support they receive.
- The Blue, Red, Amber, Green (BRAG) rating system is used well by teams in focussing team discussion to ensure early interventions are appropriate and best practice is shared. This ensures the learner receives the right support, at the right time, to get them back on track.
- The Review by Exception (RBE) process is used well by staff to identify both high performing and underperforming groups. This is leading to significant change in approaches to delivery. Actions are implemented and monitored regularly to improve outcomes for learners. The RBE is further supported by progression boards where staff identify learners causing concern and target support to ensure they can successfully achieve.
- The college's observation of learning and teaching practice, conducted by learning and teaching leaders, has developed during the pandemic. There is now a more informal, locally supported approach. Teaching practice is supported through the work of the CELT team and

the Brightspace Champions located within sectors. This is supplemented by peer support within departments. Feedback from staff regarding this approach has been positive and is supporting well the delivery and outcomes of online learning.

Area for further progress and actions required

- There are no areas for development identified.

Learner progress and outcomes

Areas of positive progress

- Most learners who enroll on a college programme are successful and attain a certificated award.
- Part-time FE programmes attainment improved recently to 81% in 2019-20, and are now above the national sector performance rate.
- PATs provide targeted support to enable learners experiencing issues to remain on programme. They complete PLSPs and populate the college BRAG dashboard to inform staff of individual learner issues. They also liaise with key external stakeholders including social workers and transition officers. Their support is well received and contributes positively towards the college's successful outcomes.
- The college has supported deferred learners from 2019/20 to achieve a positive outcome. Almost all learners returned to complete outstanding units, start a new course or repeat their programme if required.

Areas for further progress and actions required

- Attainment rates for learners on full-time FE programmes have declined over the last three years.
- Staff in a few curriculum teams do not engage fully in self-evaluation processes or use data sufficiently well to support action-planning for improvement.

What happens next?

The progress visit report will be shared with SFC, the college Board (and in multi-college regions, the Regional Strategic Body).

Barbara Nelson
HM Inspector