Education Scotland
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Collation of key messages from college Evaluative Reports and Enhancement Plans

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1. Introduction

In 2017, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and Education Scotland introduced revised arrangements for assuring and improving the quality of provision and services in Scottish colleges. This included a new quality framework, *How good is our college? (HGIOC?)* and the requirement for colleges to:

- Produce an Evaluative Report (ER) on the quality of provision and services using *HGIOC?* quality indicators, setting out areas of strengths and areas for development alongside their performance in meeting SFC Outcome Agreement (OA) targets.

- Produce an Enhancement Plan (EP) outlining planned actions and timescales for addressing areas for development identified within the ER; and

- Submit the ER and EP to Education Scotland and SFC by 31 October for formal, independent, endorsement.

The following report was commissioned by SFC. It presents a collation of the key areas of strength and aspects for improvement identified by colleges and contained within the twenty-seven college-devised EREPs published in January, 2019. The report will inform work of partner agencies and the college sector in supporting and securing improvement.

2. Summary

Following is a summary from the college published EREPs;

2.1. Governance and leadership of change (Quality Indicator 1.1)

Colleges were asked to evaluate the impact of leadership at all levels in the process of change and planning for continuous improvement.

Strengths

- All colleges report strengths in the support and challenge provided by their respective Boards. Colleges highlighted the role of Board members in taking good account of college strategic priorities and monitoring of performance across college functions.

- Almost all colleges report strengths in engagement with stakeholders, particularly partnership working with Students' Associations.

- Most colleges cite strengths in developing college strategies which take good account of identified priorities. In particular, these refer to investment in career-long professional learning for college managers.

- Many colleges feel that they take a proactive role with partners in their regional area in leading developments to improve outcomes for young people. This includes devising and revising school-college provision.

- The majority of colleges cite strengths in relation to target setting. These refer to Board and management team use of data and college reports to inform target setting.

Areas for improvement

- Some colleges recognise a need to improve Board members understanding of the context of the college sector. In addition, they acknowledge a need to strengthen further employer engagement to influence and enhance the curriculum to take account of projected industry needs.

- A few colleges identify a need to improve consistency of engagement with the Students' Association and to increase managers' knowledge of national and regional priorities.

- Some colleges note the need to improve communication of college priorities and strategic direction to staff and to improve arrangements for setting realistic and stretching targets through provision of accessible and timeous data sets.

2.2. Leadership of evaluation to facilitate improvement (Quality Indicator 1.4)

Colleges were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of leadership of evaluation arrangements and how they bring about improvement.

Strengths

- Almost all colleges identify strengths in the provision of direction and support by managers to enable staff to participate in evaluative activities and plan for improvement.

- Most colleges indicate that they make good use of real-time data effectively to provide staff with learner performance information. This includes methods to capture learner feedback and identify improvement actions.

- The majority of colleges report strengths in relation to evaluative activities leading to improvements in learner outcomes. These include a range of actions from extending access to ICT facilities to provision of increased levels of support and guidance.

- Around two thirds of colleges cite strengths in incorporating Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) priorities within quality processes. These include piloting joint evaluation activities with local schools. For these colleges DYW is having a positive impact in supporting closer collaboration between themselves, schools and the local education authority.

- The majority of colleges report strengths in arrangements for monitoring and reviewing targets to inform improvements.

Areas for improvement

- A few colleges recognise the need to better support managers and staff to take ownership of college evaluation processes. They comment on a need to improve the consistency of staff understanding and engagement in use of corporate data to make informed judgements about quality of provision and plan for improvement.

- A number of colleges identify the need to improve the response rate of learners to surveys and differing staff practices in relation to responding to feedback from learners and class representatives.

- Two thirds of colleges recognise that there is a need to improve the capacity of support service teams to formulate evaluative reports and plan for improvement.

- Around a third of colleges identify a need to engage staff teams more productively in analysing and reporting on factors which are contributing to learner attendance, retention and attainment rates.

- A quarter of colleges recognise a need to involve employers more systematically in evaluation and curriculum planning processes, particularly in relation to identifying current and emerging industry skill requirements.

- A few colleges identify a need for more local authority and school involvement in evaluation and planning discussions.

2.3. Curriculum (Quality Indicator 2.2)

Colleges were asked to evaluate how well the curriculum takes account of strategic drivers to meet the needs of all learners and stakeholders including employers.

Strengths

- Almost all colleges cite strengths in developing the curriculum in line with national priorities and the ambitions of DYW. These predominantly refer to the portfolio of provision and design of the curriculum being informed by national policy and supporting local and regional economic demand.

- Almost all colleges cite strengths in the effective use of Labour Market Intelligence to plan the curriculum and in eliciting and incorporating the views of employers and industry stakeholders to plan for improvement. These mainly refer to the range of approaches used to engage employers.

- The majority of colleges identify strengths in incorporating learners' views in the planning and review of the curriculum. These mainly refer to the application of a broad range of mechanisms to gather learners' views on learning and teaching activities and the content of college programmes.

- Almost all colleges report strengths in providing suitable entry and exit points to ease access and transition to learning, and progression to further learning and work.

- Almost all colleges cite strengths in arrangements to ensuring learners are gaining relevant, up-to-date knowledge and skills to enter the workplace or progress to further learning.

- The majority of colleges cite strengths in the incorporation and planning of work-based learning activities to develop employability.

Areas for improvement

- A few colleges report an area for development in improving the consistency and productivity of curriculum teams in engaging employers and industry partners in evaluation and planning processes.

- More than a few colleges report an area for development regarding the need to increase work placement and work-based learning opportunities to equip learners for the workplace; and raising the profile and prioritising of work-based learning activities within curriculum planning processes.

2.4. Learning, teaching and assessment (Quality Indicator 2.3)

Colleges were asked to evaluate how well learners engage in learning activates, and how well teaching approaches meet learning needs and how use of resources, including digital technologies, impact on learning.

Strengths

- All colleges report strengths in learner motivation and engagement.

- Most colleges report that staff plan lessons well and use an appropriate range of learning and teaching methods that are valued by learners.

- A few colleges identify the effective use of digital technology and project based learning as significant factors in achieving high levels of learner engagement.

- Almost all colleges report strengths in learners' development of skills to achieve, attain and progress within classes.

- Almost all colleges report strengths in lecturer maintenance and application of up-to-date knowledge of industry and workplace practice to support learning.

- All colleges report strengths in lecturers' use of resources and digital technologies to support and enhance purposeful learning. These predominately refer to staff use of high quality digital resources to deliver units and programmes.

- All colleges report strengths in lecturer involvement of learners in planning and personalising their own learning. These mainly refer to teaching staff taking account of the interests and aspirations of individual learners and class groups when planning learning.

- Almost all colleges report strengths in lecturer application of assessment arrangements to meet the needs of individual learners. These generally refer to the application of a wide variety of well-developed assessment approaches.

- Almost all colleges report strengths in lecturer reflection on outcomes of learning and teaching approaches to continuously improve the learning experience.

Areas for improvement

- A few colleges report an area for development in improving the quality of learning and teaching in some teaching departments; and ensuring contextualisation and arrangements for delivery of core skills in providing appropriately engaging experiences for learners.

- Around a quarter of colleges report an area for development in improving delivery approaches and incorporating development of Career Management Skills within programmes.

- A few colleges report the need to improve the range of delivery approaches applied by some lecturing staff; and increase the proficiency of lecturers to use digital technology effectively to support and enhance learning and teaching.

- More than a few colleges identify involving learners more consistently and productively in providing feedback on learning and teaching as an area for improvement.

- More than a few colleges report an area for development relating to staff understanding of the role of quality assurance and enhancement processes in improving learning and teaching.

2.5. Services to support learning (Quality Indicator 2.4)

Colleges were asked to evaluate the provision of support services. It includes information provided to applicants and services delivered to ensure learners benefit from appropriate support arrangements to ensure they remain on programme and succeed.

Strengths

- Most colleges cite strengths in arrangements to support learners prior to and during their college experience. These predominantly relate to collegiate working between admissions, student funding and teaching departments.

- Almost all colleges report strengths in providing opportunities for learners to identify support needs. These mainly refer to staff applying customer-friendly approaches to encourage early disclosure of support needs, including profiling of core skills.

- Two thirds of colleges report strengths in arrangements for disbursement of student funds. These mainly relate to the impact of recent and on-going improvements to funding application and disbursement processes.

- Two thirds of colleges cite strengths in arrangements for learners to monitor and discuss their progress with a member of staff. These predominantly refer to learners being allocated a named member of staff who provides individualised guidance and tutorial support.

- Half of colleges cite strengths in the adeptness of support staff in adjusting approaches to take account of different learner needs. These refer to arrangements to meet the needs of specific groups of learners, particularly care experienced, learners with mental health issues and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and carers.

- Around a third of colleges report strengths in support services staff drawing on reflective practice to improve the learning experience. These predominantly refer to the work of staff teams in discussing and forming approaches to improve services.

Areas for improvement

- Around a quarter of colleges identify the need to align arrangements for delivery of support services better with the needs of learners.

- A few colleges identify the need to improve the speed and efficacy of systems to enable prompt processing of funding applications; and evaluating the impact of revisions to bursary policy to identify and measure improvement.

- Around half of colleges identify ensuring learners are made aware of the full range of support services available to them from teaching and support service departments, prior to the start of programmes as an area for improvement.

- A third of colleges highlight the need to improve collaboration between support services and teaching teams to plan interventions to improve outcomes for learners.

2.6. Wellbeing, equality and inclusion (Quality Indicator 3.1)

Colleges were asked to evaluate how well the college complies with equalities legislation and how inclusion and equality arrangements improve outcomes for learners and stakeholders.

Strengths

- Almost all colleges report strengths in their actions to meet equalities legislation. These generally refer to processes and activities which have been implemented, or are being developed further, to improve outcomes for target groups.

- Almost all colleges identify strengths in their environments for learning being inclusive and supportive.

- The majority of colleges identify strengths in relation to promoting and celebrating diversity within the life and work of the college. These include fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment.

- Almost all colleges cite strengths in the planning of provision to support specific groups of learners. These generally refer to partnership working with public and third-sector organisations to improve participation.

Areas for improvement

- Most colleges identify the need to improve the attainment rates of care-experienced learners and improve the gender balance on programmes.

- More than a few colleges specify improving systems for tracking target groups of learners and increasing the quality and use of data.

- The majority of colleges report an area for development in increasing the number of learners self-referring to access additional support services and building organisational capacity to respond to the increasing levels of learners with barriers to learning as areas for development.

2.7. Equity, achievement and attainment for all learners (Quality Indicator 3.2)

Colleges were asked to evaluate how well learners succeed. It includes analysis of programme outcomes over time.

Strengths

- The majority of colleges report strengths in improving further and higher education learner success over time.

- The majority of colleges report strengths in addressing factors which contribute to poor retention rates. These include pre-entry and early identification of support needs and arrangements for monitoring attendance at the initial stages of programmes to instigate earlier interventions.

- The majority of colleges cite strengths in improving attainment rates of essential skills. These include improved contextualisation of core skills components of programmes and more visible signposting of employability skills within the curriculum.

- Almost all colleges identify strengths in improving outcomes for individuals and groups learners with additional barriers to learning

Areas for improvement

- Most colleges cite an area for development referring to improving full-time further education recruitment, retention and attainment.

- Over a third of colleges cite an area for development in relation working with curriculum teams to surface and resolve issues that are impacting negatively on attainment, including school-college programmes.

- A third of colleges identify improving success rates for care-experienced learners; increasing the retention and success rates of 16 to 19 year olds and learners on school-college programmes as an area for development.

3. What happens next

This report will be used to inform discussion about supporting the college sector to build on strengths and address areas for improvement. Education Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council will work with Scottish Government, College Development Network, *Sparqs,* the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, and Skills Development Scotland to ensure areas for improvement inform planning for professional learning and support.