

Validation report: **Guernsey College of Further Education**

Validation dates: **7 – 11 December 2015**

Managing Inspector: **Dr John Bowditch**

Type of establishment: **Further education college**

Introduction

The validation was carried out by a team of five HM Inspectors, who spent three days in the college observing learning and teaching and holding discussions with learners, staff and stakeholders. They considered information on learner attainment and evaluated learner progress and outcomes. They met with members of the Board of Governors and obtained feedback from community groups, partners and employers who work with the college.

The context of the college

Guernsey College of Further Education (FE) is a general FE college and is the only college of further and higher education in the Bailiwick. The college serves the needs of the entire Bailiwick community, having learners from all the islands: Guernsey; Alderney; Sark; and Herm.

College activities are delivered across three main campuses in St Peter Port: Coutanchez campus; Delancey campus; and Les Ozouets campus that also houses the purpose-built Princess Royal Centre for Performing Arts.

Around 5,000 learners enrol each year on a portfolio of over 300 courses, ranging from access level to graduate programmes. Of the 5,000 enrolments, just over 500 are full-time learners and approximately 350 are states registered apprentices. Between 300 and 400 are 14-16 year old pupils from the island's schools and the remainder are part-time learners on a wide range of courses which includes the adult education programme.

How well do learners learn and achieve?

Improvements in performance

Over the last 18 months the college has put considerable effort into improving its data collection, analysis and reporting processes. Managers have limited confidence in the robustness of previous data sets and so there is no accurate historical data on which to base any trend analysis. For the purposes of this report the 2014-15 data for the college has been considered as a baseline.

The retention rate for learners on programmes across the college sits at 88% overall. There is some variation by category of programme, ranging from 97% for learners on full-time level 1 programmes to 73% for learners on level 2 apprenticeship programmes. However, in a few specific programme areas, such as full-time level 2 and 3 Sport, retention rates are low.

The achievement rate for learners on programmes across the college sits at 79% overall. There is considerable variation by programme category by level and subject area, ranging from 96% for learners on full-time level 3 programmes to 57% for learners on level 2 apprenticeship programmes. Learners on full-time level 3 programmes achieve high levels of success. Achievement rates for learners on school-link programmes is high, sitting at 88% overall.

However, achievement rates for full-time learners on level 1 and 2 programmes are low overall, particularly in programme areas such as level 1 Personal and Social Development and level 2 Performing Arts and Sport. Too many learners are completing these programmes and achieving only partial success. Achievement rates on apprenticeship programmes are inconsistent overall, with some rates particularly low, often due to poor timely progress.

The college collects data on learners' progression routes. There are still some concerns about the robustness and completeness of the data but it gives an indication to where learners progress. In 2014-15, 36% of full-time learners progressed to further study at FE or HE level. A further 36% progressed into employment and 19% were unemployed. The destination of 8% of learners remains unknown.

The majority of learners are making good progress during their programmes of study and gain useful skills that allow them to enter employment or further study. The majority of learners who complete their programmes gain certificated awards. Learners who complete their programmes with partial success gain a number of the programme units.

Learners in the college develop an awareness of health and wellbeing, particularly through the enrichment programme. A number of learners gain useful skills for employability through work placements and work experience, as part of their programme. Many programmes incorporate opportunities for learners to participate in competitions, enhanced qualifications and award schemes which widen and enhance their skills for employability. Many learners participate in a range of community and volunteering events that develop good citizenship skills and promote the college and their programmes in a positive way.

The college uses some external data to benchmark its performance against national performance levels. The relatively small size of the college cohort makes it difficult to interpret the significance of differences from the national performance level. Currently there is limited internal benchmarking of data, either between level of programme or by curriculum area. Curriculum teams do not use performance indicators (PIs), such as retention, achievement and success rates, to benchmark their programmes with other curriculum areas across the college and inform self-evaluation activities. PIs are not currently used for target setting for improvement.

Learners' experiences

Most learners work purposefully and participate enthusiastically in a range of learning activities to develop their skills and confidence. They are well motivated in their learning and apply themselves conscientiously to individual and group tasks. Almost all learners are confident in using a wide range of resources to support and enhance their learning. Learners use Information and Communications Technology (ICT) well to support their learning, and make lessons, particularly theory, more interesting. This included the use of smartphones, tablets and a range of applications, including social media. They are often innovative in finding local solutions in the use of smart technologies to overcome the barriers they face in accessing ICT due to inconsistent wireless broadband coverage across the college.

Most learners take responsibility for developing an independence in their own learning and developing skills for future study. They progress well and improve their confidence. Most learners produce good quality work and developed a range of appropriate academic, vocational and personal skills.

Learners participate in a series of enrichment activities which add value to their programmes and employability. This includes trips and visits outwith the college to commercial premises, employers and wider community partners. For example, learners on performing arts programmes visited primary schools to help raise awareness and promote health-related issues, such as alcohol awareness. Learners on a few programmes, such as hairdressing and beauty therapy, complete additional vendor qualifications which enhances their employability. On many programmes, learners enjoy and develop skills for citizenship through the incorporation of community-facing and fundraising activities.

Most learners use a range of techniques, supported by teaching staff, to reflect effectively on their learning and understand goals for future learning activities. However, a few learners were not confident about their progress and did not have access to consistent information to support their understanding of the skills they required to progress in their learning.

How well does the college support learners to develop and learn?

Teaching for effective learning

Almost all teaching staff plan individual lessons well and use well developed lesson plans to support delivery. These lesson plans include detail on the development of vocational skills, English and mathematics, health and wellbeing, the principles of

getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) and employability skills. However, in more than a few programme areas planning for full programme delivery is not fully effective. This leads to issues that impact negatively on learners, such as timetabling, class cover and scheduling of assessments. The recently developed Equality and Diversity Strategy is in the early stages of implementation. As a consequence teaching staff do not yet routinely promote equality and diversity in lessons.

Core skills (English and mathematics) are delivered centrally, by a small teaching team. However, in the delivery of lessons these skills are not sufficiently contextualised and some learners find it difficult to see the relevance to their vocational area of study. In most programmes, core skills are embedded and highlighted in lesson plans. However, these are not always signposted effectively during lessons to ensure learners are aware of their development.

Almost all teaching staff use an appropriate range of resources confidently to make lessons engaging and to support learning. They use recently updated ICT and pedagogy skills effectively to enhance their teaching skills and adapt their teaching approaches well. However, the unreliability of access to ICT is impacting on the confidence of teaching staff and learners to develop and use this technology to supplement and extend learning. Learners have insufficient access to computers in classrooms and the reliability of ICT leaves many learners lacking confidence in systems. Wireless broadband connectivity is slow and difficult to access, particularly in the Delancey campus. In spite of these challenges, teaching staff are creative in finding local solutions to using a wide range of applications and systems in learning and teaching activities.

Most teaching staff demonstrate strong productive relationships to support learners to build confidence and progress in their learning. Across the college, teaching staff and learners create a positive atmosphere for purposeful learning to take place. Almost all teaching staff use the *Pen Profile* of learners to support effectively the learning needs of individuals. However, a majority of teaching staff do not promote sufficiently high standards of timekeeping or classroom management.

Teaching staff use assessment well to test and affirm understanding and achievement by learners. Lessons routinely start with a well-structured reflection on previous learning. Most teaching staff provide useful feedback to learners that allows them to understand their progress and understand areas for improvement. However, in the majority of programmes, planning and scheduling of assessment at course level is not sufficiently rigorous and at times leads to an assessment burden for learners.

The quality of the college estate is variable. The facilities for learners at the Princess Royal Centre for Performing Arts are excellent. However, across the other campuses, a number of the teaching rooms have poor décor, are untidy and are uninspiring for learning. In workshop areas, there is insufficient focus on risk assessment and health and safety. There is limited access in some areas of the college for learners and staff with mobility difficulties. Arrangements for learners with physical disabilities in the workshops are insufficient.

Meeting learning needs

The college offers a wide range of programmes at different levels and modes of delivery which meets the needs of learners, the local community and most employers well. These range from introductory access level programmes, through part-time apprenticeship programmes to full-time programmes across a number of levels. Apprenticeship programmes are offered on a day-release basis to sit alongside employers' business needs. The college offers an extensive adult education programme which attracts a wide range of learners to both day and evening classes. A few programmes are delivered through flexible learning.

Programmes are accessible with entry levels at suitable points to ensure learners gain access at appropriate levels. Progression routes are well signposted for learners. Many programmes provide suitable exit points into employment as well as providing a good base to further study.

Some of the provision is targeted at specific vulnerable groups of learners, including those with challenging behaviour and those who had disengaged from learning in school.

A few courses offer additional industry-based qualifications which impact positively on the employability opportunities for learners. Hairdressing and beauty therapy programmes include a range of certificated vendor qualifications to enhance opportunities for employment. However, the absence of these additional qualifications in other programme areas, such as sport and computing, result in missed opportunities for learners to be better prepared for employment.

Some of the programme teams, including care, computing and engineering, work well with partners, employers and stakeholders to design and develop a range of programmes to meet specific needs in a local context.

The college works in partnership effectively with its local high schools to deliver a good range of college-based programmes which provide pupils with a wide range of vocational options. Pupils attend college one half-day each week over their final two years in school. Pupils are exposed to a range of vocational areas, including construction, engineering, hairdressing and health and social care, which develop useful skills and inform possible career choices. Retention and achievement rates on these programmes are high.

Around 60% of pupils completing year 11 in school progress to the college. In the transition between high school and college, pupils are supported well by school, college and career service staff. Pupil information, including school-identified support needs, are transferred from the school to the college to help inform any support that needs to be put in place to assist transition. However, this information is not comprehensive or consistent and not always transferred in a format that is easy for college staff to utilise.

Most learners are provided with appropriate information prior to enrolling at the college to help them to choose the programme of study that best meets their needs. However, entry qualifications are not always applied consistently, and where levels of English

are poor, learners do not always receive sufficient support to enable them to complete coursework to the required standard. All full-time learners are assessed at entry to determine the appropriate levelling for English and mathematics using a well-established computer-based profiling assessment. A few curriculum teams supplement this with written exercises at interview to determine appropriate levelling.

Generally, learners are supported appropriately during their studies by useful information, advice and support services available at each campus. Arrangements for learners to access and be identified for additional support are not yet fully embedded. This restricts the overall effectiveness of the support the college provides. However, those learners with diagnosed additional need are supported well by learning support assistants who provide a range of services to help them overcome barriers to learning.

The small team of progress coaches provide valuable support to those learners identified as being at greatest risk of disengaging from learning. Each progress coach has a caseload of learners that they support in a variety of ways, including regular one-to-one meetings, to encourage regular attendance and assessment submission. They are also available to provide immediate support should a learner require crisis support to manage their behaviour. Learners supported by progress coaches are identified through the transition information that is passed on from schools and by referral by teaching staff using the *ProMonitor* software. All full-time learners are interviewed by a progress coach during the enrolment process and have the opportunity to self-refer.

Individual guidance sessions are designed to link into the college *ProMonitor* system to support learners in setting goals and reflect on their learning. This is particularly helpful for learners who have attendance or attainment issues, leading to early staff intervention or the deployment of progress coaches.

Guidance for next steps in learning or employment are not yet fully effective. In a few programme areas guidance is focussed on progression opportunities within the college or Universities and Colleges Application System (UCAS) applications to university.

Partnership working

The college has a clear strategic commitment to partnership working with a range of local and key stakeholders. Constructive partnership arrangements are established for developing and delivering positive outcomes for the Bailiwick of Guernsey economy, local businesses and local people. The college strategic vision, *Vision 2018*, has a clear statement of intent to be a business and community-facing college with a demand-led curriculum delivered in a flexible learning environment.

The college has many effective and productive relationships with local employers, social enterprises and community partners which enhance and inform college programmes and services which support learners. The college has recently been actively promoting their profile and the services offered by them to the wider community, employers and other agencies. The principal has established a visible presence in the community and as a result the local awareness of the college is growing.

A useful *Today, Tomorrow, Together* summary report has been produced and shared across the business community and other stakeholders, which helpfully describes recent developments in the college. The principal chairs the implementation group of Skills Guernsey, a local forum of partners who provide skills and training programmes to employers with a declared aim of making locally available skills development more relevant and responsive to the workplace.

The college works effectively with a range of employers in relation to work placements, apprenticeships and other programmes. However, a few employers have experienced less positive engagement with the college recently during the restructuring process where key staff contacts may have changed, or where delays in decision making were frustrating. Employers highlight the need for more bespoke delivery by the college to better meet business needs. There is a perception amongst a few employers that full-time students are now the priority for the college, at the expense of part-time programmes.

Adult and Community learners value highly the learning experience they enjoy mainly in leisure and hobby areas. High quality teaching combined with real commitment from highly motivated teaching staff in evening classes works well for almost all learners. Whilst Adult and Community learners were satisfied with their college experience, they were unclear about how they could influence the offer from the college. These learners have never been asked for feedback, despite some learners undertaking many courses over many years. Staff delivering evening classes are not monitored and attendance and drop outs are not followed up.

Some community partners and employers have frustrations about the college's current ability to deliver programmes at times of the year that suits their organisation's need. The college is currently in dialogue with these partners to explore solutions to improve flexibility.

How well does the college improve the quality of its work?

Improvement through self-evaluation

Self-evaluation reporting within faculties is variable and the college recognises the need for improvement in this area. Currently, learners, learner representatives and other stakeholders have no involvement in the self-evaluation processes, although learners complete a *learner voice* survey three times a year. The gathering of learner views relating to learning and teaching is not systematic and is insufficiently developed to inform effective actions for improvement within programmes or across the college.

In most programme areas, teaching staff meet regularly at team meetings to evaluate learning and teaching and share practice for improvement. Almost all teaching staff engage in a range of activities to support their professional development. This includes a college-wide lesson observation scheme and membership of cross-college professional learning communities which meet regularly. The college has recently updated the processes for evaluating and analysing learning and teaching. However, these processes are not fully embedded or understood sufficiently by teaching staff and it is too early to measure potential impact.

Most programme teams do not analyse PI data sufficiently well and do not use trend data or data benchmarking to inform reflections on low performing programmes. Programme team skills in evaluation and reflection, together with setting specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) targets for improvement are not sufficiently well developed. In most programme self-evaluation reports actions identified to bring about improvement do not fully address major issues relating to outcomes for learners.

Leadership of improvement and change

The college has developed a clear vision for the future which aligns well with the aspirations within the Education Department's vision for the future of tertiary education. A range of external stakeholders also contributed to this vision.

Appropriate strategic aims support the vision and are usefully summarised in the *Towards 2018* document, with a key focus on recruitment, retention, and achievement. Values are articulated as part of the *PRIDE* initiative – putting learners first; rewarding relationships; inspiring people; delivering excellent service and exceeding expectations. The college Quality Improvement Plan 2015-16 clearly links improvements to the four strategic aims.

The college vision and strategic aims together with the aspiration to be world class and to achieve transformation is not yet shared by all staff. Generally, staff are optimistic about the future for the college but some view that the pace of change has been challenging. A perception by some staff that change has primarily been a top-down approach means that currently there is insufficient ownership of the need for or the benefits from change.

Human resources, ICT and estates strategies are identified as key risks by the college and potential obstacles to their future development. The college recognises the need to work more constructively with the Education Department and other partner organisations to find solutions to the existing challenges.

Effective leadership for learning and teaching is provided by the vice principal supported by the college leadership team, which includes the four faculty directors. The college has recently produced a draft Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy but it has not been widely shared and its impact has yet to be determined.

Dissemination and sharing of practice by teaching staff is beginning to happen through the in-service training days planned across the calendar. Practice worthy of dissemination is identified through observation of teaching and learning arrangements, through discussions within the professional learning communities and by teaching and learning coaches. This is having a positive impact on the learner experience in the classrooms. Most teaching staff benefit from a wide range of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities to develop additional skills or additional qualifications. Staff are supported by the college to gain a Certificate in Education within a reasonable timescale, where they begin work at the college without this qualification.

Whilst many staff are highly motivated and enjoy working at the college, the pause in formal performance review processes for staff has meant that they have not benefitted recently from feedback on their performance or had systematic feedback on their career progression or training needs. However, a new performance review and professional development system for teaching staff has recently been introduced for the current academic year.

Through the restructure, the college provision of services to support learners has been overhauled. The college has developed what they now describe as a wrap-around learner support service with a team of staff whose role is to provide general and specific support for learners. There is some early impact of these changes in services to support learners. However, the college recognises that more needs to be done in relation to partnership working with other specialist agencies who provide specialist services.

Corporate services are not yet part of the transformational change, although a review is happening at the moment. Many issues that should have been dealt with routinely like health and safety, building repairs, maintenance and making the most of the environment for learning have been overlooked. Whilst technicians work closely with their own curriculum areas, there is generally a lack of clarity around where responsibility for general care, maintenance and housekeeping rests.

Within the four faculties, programme leaders have substantial responsibility for enhancing quality and maintaining an effective quality culture. At senior management level, the vice principal, supported by other members of the college leadership team are beginning to work together to provide a strategic overview of quality. New arrangements have been recently put in place to provide faculties and programme leaders with dedicated administration support, although the full benefit of this change has yet to be recognised.

Policies and procedures are being developed by the college where they do not already exist. However, many are in draft form and have yet to have any impact on the learner experience.

Monthly performance assessment monitoring (PAM) meetings have begun with a focus on monitoring learner data and reporting progress. This allows more timely identification of areas in need of early intervention. However, programme leaders are only now developing the confidence to participate in these discussions, and the wider staff group are not fully aware of the development of these discussions and their potential usefulness.

Cover arrangements for staff absence are a significant challenge. In addition to an already substantial workload, programme leaders often provide this cover and as a result are not always able to prioritise their management tasks. Some cover arrangements are insufficiently effective, and as a result learner progress is adversely affected. Currently the college and Education Department are not working together sufficiently effectively to find workable solutions to long-running challenges around cover and recruitment of staff. Better and more effective partnership working is necessary to support college planning for improvement and enhancement for learners.

Summary

Capacity for improvement

The college has undergone significant change in the last two years with renewed leadership taking forward the challenge of ensuring the college curriculum meets the needs of a range of stakeholders within the Bailiwick of Guernsey. The quality of the learner experience is good overall, but there is headroom for improvement. Teaching teams are at the early stage of some of these changes, including introducing more effective forms of self-evaluation that are more inclusive and outcome-driven. Leadership within the college is still at a transitional stage with many managers still developing their roles. A review of corporate services is currently underway.

HM Inspectors are able to validate the college's self-evaluation overall.

This validation visit found the following key strengths.

- The college offers a wide range of programmes at different levels and modes of delivery which meets the needs of learners, the local community and most employers well.
- Most learners are motivated and work purposefully and participate enthusiastically in a range of learning activities.
- Almost all teaching staff plan individual lessons well and use an appropriate range of resources confidently to make lessons engaging and to support learning.
- The college has a clear strategic commitment to partnership working with a range of local and key stakeholders. Constructive partnership arrangements are established for developing and delivering positive outcomes for the Bailiwick of Guernsey economy, local businesses and local people.

We discussed with staff and the Education Department how they might continue to improve the college. This is what we agreed with them.

- Continue to improve retention and achievement rates, particularly in those programme areas where they are low.
- Provide staff with the necessary CPD to enable them to engage more fully in self-evaluation activities to support improvement.
- The college and Education Department need to work together more effectively to find workable solutions to long-running challenges around cover and recruitment of staff.

Here are the evaluations for Guernsey College of Further Education.

Improvements in performance	satisfactory
Learners' experiences	good
Teaching for effective learning	good
Meeting learning needs	satisfactory
Improvement through self-evaluation	weak
Leadership of improvement and change	satisfactory

What happens at the end of the validation?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that most of the college's self-evaluation processes will lead to improvements in due course. However, the college requires more time to allow some of the recent changes to impact positively on learners. Our Guernsey Link Inspector will work with the Education Department to build capacity for improvement and will maintain contact to monitor the college's progress.

Dr John Bowditch
HM Inspector

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Appendix 1

<p>Excellent</p> <p>6</p>	<p>Outstanding or sector leading An evaluation of excellent applies to provision which is sector leading. Learners' experiences and achievements are of a very high quality. An evaluation of excellent represents an outstanding standard of provision which exemplifies very best practice and is worth disseminating beyond the college. It implies that very high levels of performance are sustainable and will be maintained.</p>
<p>Very good</p> <p>5</p>	<p>Major strengths An evaluation of very good applies to provision characterised by major strengths. There are very few areas for improvement and any that do exist do not significantly diminish learners' experiences. Whilst an evaluation of very good represents a high standard of provision, it is a standard that should be achievable by all. It implies that it is fully appropriate to continue to make provision without significant adjustment. However, there is an expectation that the college will take opportunities to improve and strive to raise performance to excellent.</p>
<p>Good</p> <p>4</p>	<p>Important strengths with areas for improvement An evaluation of good applies to provision characterised by important strengths which, taken together, clearly outweigh any areas for improvement. An evaluation of good represents a standard of provision in which the strengths have a significantly positive impact. However, the quality of learners' experiences is diminished in some way by aspects in which improvement is required. It implies that the college should seek to improve further the areas of important strength, but take action to address the areas for improvement.</p>
<p>Satisfactory</p> <p>3</p>	<p>Strengths just outweigh weaknesses An evaluation of satisfactory applies to provision characterised by strengths which just outweigh weaknesses. An evaluation of satisfactory indicates that learners have access to a basic level of provision. It represents a standard where the strengths have a positive impact on learners' experiences. However, while the weaknesses are not important enough to have a substantially adverse impact, they do constrain the overall quality of learners' experiences. It implies that the college should take action to address areas of weakness by building on its strengths.</p>
<p>Weak</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Important weaknesses An evaluation of weak applies to provision which has some strengths, but where there are important weaknesses. In general, an evaluation of weak may be arrived at in a number of circumstances. While there may be some strength, important weaknesses will, either individually or collectively, be sufficient to diminish learners' experiences in substantial ways. It implies the need for prompt, structured and planned action on the part of the college.</p>
<p>Unsatisfactory</p> <p>1</p>	<p>An evaluation of unsatisfactory applies when there are major weaknesses in provision requiring immediate remedial action. Learners' experiences are at risk in significant respects. In almost all cases, staff responsible for provision evaluated as unsatisfactory will require support from senior managers in planning and carrying out the necessary actions to effect improvement. This may involve working alongside other staff or agencies in or beyond the college.</p>