Education Scotland
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Supporting learners to succeed

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A thematic report by Education Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council on provision of services delivered by Scotland's colleges to support learners to succeed in their learning

Transforming lives through learning

Scottish Funding Council
Promoting further and higher education

Contents

1.   Context

Life can be complicated and on the journey between enrolment and graduation many circumstances can militate against learners completing their programme successfully. Once a learner has applied for and been placed on the right programme, some people may assume that from this point forward any success or failure would be down to the quality of learning and teaching. Whilst recognising that poor teaching certainly impacts on learner success rates, it is important to understand that it is not the only factor. There are many circumstances which lead to learners being unable to achieve and complete their programme successfully. Some of these circumstances are outwith the control of learners and colleges, such as ill health or changes to work and personal circumstances. However, it is the role of colleges to anticipate potential barriers to learning and provide support services which reduce the risk of learners leaving programmes early and not achieving their individual goals.

This report focuses on the actions taken by colleges to help learners resolve issues which are affecting their ability to turn up for classes, engage fully in learning and undertake assessments successfully. It explains the range of services and the relationships colleges have with other external bodies to provide support for learning.

In preparing this report, reviewers visited a sample of five colleges, detailed on page 19 of this report. They also drew on the findings of published Education Scotland external reviews of colleges, reports of annual engagement visits and examined other relevant publications and reports.

This report identifies areas of positive practice and areas for development. Colleges should act on the recommendations contained in this report. College inspectors will monitor action towards implementation of these recommendations as part of their professional dialogue with colleges and will wish to discuss progress and issues arising from thematic aspect reports during annual engagement visits. In addition. Education Scotland will ensure key messages and recommendations within this report are conveyed to all relevant educational sectors and external bodies.

2.   Methodology

This report is the second of a suite of reports commissioned by the Scottish Funding Council to evaluate support for learning. It builds on from the report *Meeting the needs of learners and employers through effective planning, application and admission processes in Scotland's colleges* (Education Scotland, February 2014)[1]. In addition, the report is complementary to *Maximising Learner Success* (Education Scotland, September 2014).[2]

The report is set in the context of the reform of post-16 education and training. It reviews the strategies and arrangements made by colleges to provide support for learners from the point of enrolment. It assesses how effectively these arrangements meet learners' needs and improve their chances of success. It investigates the range of college services which are involved in supporting learners and the impact of external factors on learner support needs.

The focus of the fieldwork for this report was informed by the findings from Education Scotland's external reviews of Scotland's college's, annual engagement visits and aspect tasks carried out in 2012-2013.
In carrying out this task, an Education Scotland team, consisting of HM Inspectors with associate assessors analysed the findings of recent external review reports and annual engagement visits and visited a sample of five colleges. The five colleges were selected to provide an appropriate sample and representation of colleges in Scotland in terms of scale, geographical spread and merger status.

During visits to the five colleges, the Education Scotland team held in-depth discussions with senior and college managers responsible for a wide range of functions, including learner services, quality, student finance, curriculum, and management information systems (MIS). The team met with groups of staff who have teaching and support roles, learner representatives and learners on further education (FE) and higher education (HE) level programmes.

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[1] Meeting the needs of learners and employers through effective planning, application and admission processes

[2] Maximising learner success

3.   Introduction

Services to support learning span a wide range of college functions. Colleges have different organisational structures and arrangements for managing and delivering services to support learning. However, for the purpose of this report, these services contribute broadly to three main areas of college provision. These are:

- **Services which contribute to the welfare of learners**;
- **Services which contribute to on-course achievement and attainment by learners**; **and**
- **Services which contribute to progression to a positive destination**.

Services which contribute to the welfare of learners refers mainly to: MIS; admissions, student funding; centralised front-line information and advice; students' associations; counselling services; safeguarding; and links with external bodies such as housing associations, social services and Jobcentre Plus.

Services which contribute to on-course achievement and attainment of learners refers mainly to: MIS; curricular guidance; additional support for technical and essential skills; support for learners who have additional barriers to learning; and learner engagement.

Services which contribute to progression to a positive destination refers mainly to activities which support learners to make informed choices about future learning and employment. This includes careers information, advice and guidance, and activities which increase learner understanding of employment options.

Although these services are described separately above, they are inter-linked and impact on each other. As a result, almost all staff in colleges, through a wide range of teaching and non-teaching roles, contribute to supporting learners to succeed.

It is worth noting that the field work for this report took place at a time of significant change in the college sector in Scotland. Many colleges were in the process of adapting policies, procedures and provision to take account of regionalisation and the increase in the scale of operation and geographical coverage. This report seeks to reflect the variations in the college sector at this time whilst promoting messages which are applicable to all colleges for moving forward.

4 Summary of findings

4.1 *Areas of positive practice*

- Almost all colleges have a strong commitment to providing learners with support which enables them to enter and complete programmes successfully and progress to a positive destination.

- Some colleges have achieved external accreditation for their work in supporting learners. The achievement of these awards is helping to create consistency of standards and approaches to supporting learners across all areas of college operations.

- Most colleges engage well with learner representatives to identify emerging learner support needs and promote the range of services available.

- All colleges have arrangements with a range of external agencies to provide learners with access to additional and specialised support services.

- Some regional colleges are providing an important catalyst for bringing together and engaging with a number of Community Planning Partnerships (CPP) and local authorities (LA) in coordinating support for learning.

- Many colleges which have benefited from new estates and refurbishments have taken opportunities to position centralised support services in highly visible, accessible locations.

- Almost all staff who are directly involved in contributing to the support of learners are committed, conscientious and work hard to support learners to stay on their programme of study.

- College staff responsible for coordinating additional support arrangements take good account of learner needs to enable individual learners and class groups to access support which is responsive and unobtrusive.

- Workshop and classroom assistants support learners well to engage in class activities and assessments.

- All colleges promote well to learners the opportunities for progression to employment and further learning. Most college programmes incorporate a range of activities which introduce learners to work and industry.

- There are some good examples of colleges working with universities and other colleges to assess the impact of services on the progression of learners.

4.2   *Areas for development*

- A few college management teams are not taking sufficient account of the external factors which may impact negatively on learner success rates when planning services to support learning. This is reducing the effectiveness of future planning to meet the changing support needs of learners.

- Most colleges do not convey sufficiently to all staff, their collective role and contribution in supporting learners to complete their programme successfully and progress to a positive destination.

- Some colleges do not have sufficiently formal communication arrangements with local external agencies to be able to plan effectively for changes to welfare arrangements which will affect learners.

- Some teaching staff do not apply a sufficient range of learning and teaching approaches to accommodate a diverse range of learner support needs within a class group setting.

- Most colleges are not taking sufficient action to analyse and compare learner retention and success rates by disability at programme and subject area to inform further investigation and planning for improvement.

- A few colleges do not have sufficiently systematic arrangements with LAs and, or schools to ensure college staff receive routinely, advance information about the support needs of individual pupils.

- Few colleges place sufficient emphasis on developing the career management skills of learners to equip them for making on-going decisions about their future employment.

- Overall, colleges are not taking sufficient opportunities to convey to CPPs, the support needs profiles of learners to assist future planning and to promote the work of colleges in supporting learners to succeed.

5   Leadership of services to support learning

5.1 *How well do colleges take account of current and projected needs of learners when planning support services?*

All colleges have a strong commitment to providing learners with support which enables them to enter and complete programmes successfully and progress to a positive destination. Almost all colleges know the profile of their learners well, for example the proportion of learners who have disclosed a disability and, or who are from the lowest postcode areas in the *Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation* (SIMD).

Regional arrangements are engaging senior managers to consider more closely the specific characteristics of their learner profile in association with Community Planning Partnerships (CPP). Merged colleges are learning from staff in legacy colleges about the needs of learners in different communities. Almost all of these colleges are drawing productively from these arrangements to plan and refresh the range of services made available to learners to support learning.

'There are many changes happening outside the college which impact on our learners. We need to get better at recognising what these are and adapting the way we go about things to address them.'- College lecturer

In all colleges, staff responsible for providing support to learners report an increase in the proportion of learners who have mental health issues and a rise in the number of young people with autism. Most colleges are addressing this through providing relevant CPD for staff. College managers report changes to the welfare system as having a significant impact on the financial circumstances of learners. Many colleges, particularly those delivering programmes in areas of high deprivation, cite poverty as a main barrier to learners maintaining and completing their studies. Most colleges are taking action to address this through increased promotion of and referral of learners to debt counselling organisations, distribution of vouchers for food banks and recycling schemes. Almost all colleges arrange training programmes for staff on working with learners who have mental health issues. However, a few college management teams are not taking sufficient account of external changes such as changes to entitlements to benefits which may impact negatively on learner success rates when planning services to support learning. This is reducing the effectiveness of future planning to meet the changing support needs of learners.

All colleges have strategies and policies for delivering services to support learners. These strategies take good account of Scottish Government directives. Recently-merged colleges are continuing to apply the arrangements from each of the legacy colleges whilst simultaneously reviewing structures and strategies to inform future planning. They are making good use of these arrangements to develop new, college-wide strategies for implementation in the next academic year. The pace at which merged colleges are able to devise new strategies for supporting learners is

predicated largely on the time required to restructure staff roles and responsibilities. In addition, the pervasive impact of services to support learners necessitates that new strategies link effectively to a wide range of college functions and policies. Most colleges are responding positively to these complexities by developing key strategies concurrently. This approach is helping to ensure new, college-wide strategies provide complementarity and are sustainable.

All of the colleges are seeking to provide all learners with equal access to support services. However, most colleges operate across multiple sites and some have considerable distances between campuses. In addition, most recently- merged colleges have inherited significant disparities from legacy colleges in terms of information and communications technology (ICT) facilities, staff skills and accommodation. Although these issues are presenting challenges in providing support services which are equitable and consistent, they are also presenting opportunities for devising new and creative ways of supporting learners. As a result, colleges are increasingly investing in ICT and social networking sites to enable learners to access support services from anywhere. Almost all colleges are making good use of these opportunities to modernise, revise and refine support services to meet the needs of learners. This is resulting in most learners having improved access to live data to monitor their own attendance and progress and electronic links to communicate directly with support services. However, many learners value and benefit from easy access to a named member of staff to gain face-to-face advice and support when required.

In almost all colleges, staff participate regularly in continuous professional development (CPD) activities to enhance and extend their skills. These activities are generally linked well to identified development and support needs. For example, almost all colleges have arranged for staff to undertake training in supporting learners who have mental health issues. Many staff have participated in training delivered by the *College Development Network* (CDN) [3] in working with people who have additional, hidden barriers to learning. Across all the colleges, teaching and support staff who have been trained by Beattie Resources for Inclusiveness in Technology and Education (BRITE) [4], support colleagues well to adapt and improve approaches to meet learner needs. Some colleges have achieved *The Buttle UK Quality Mark for Care Leavers*[5] in recognition of their work with looked after and accommodated young people. A few colleges have achieved or are working towards the BRITE *Chartermark for Inclusiveness in Education.* The achievement of these awards is helping to create consistency of standards and approaches to supporting learners across all areas of college operations. However, reductions in staffing levels have resulted in almost all colleges losing valuable staff experience and expertise in supporting learners. Most colleges are taking steps to address this through recruitment and CPD arrangements.

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[3] College Development Network
[4] The BRITE Initiative
[5] Buttle UK

'I came to the college at the age of 50. It was here that I discovered the reason why I had experienced such difficulties over the years is that I have severe dyslexia. The support I have been given changed my life and my confidence.' - Learner on HND programme

Some colleges have considerable distances between campuses and in a few areas the timing and frequency of public transport presents challenges for learners. In a few colleges, learners on some programmes require to travel to another, more distant campus in order to progress to further or advanced level study. This often requires earlier and additional travel time, which affects in particular, learners who have childcare and caring responsibilities and, or who have jobs. Most colleges take good account of these issues and make flexible arrangements to accommodate the needs and wider commitments of learners.

5.2 *How well do colleges' internal arrangements contribute to effective delivery of support for learning?*

In almost all colleges there are good arrangements for staff within individual departments to work together to design and develop provision to improve the outcomes for learners. Across the wide range of college functions most staff teams collaborate formally and informally to resolve issues and keep up-to-date with developments. However, most colleges do not convey sufficiently to all staff, their collective role and contribution in supporting learners to complete their programme successfully and progress to a positive destination. This results in missed opportunities for teaching and support departments to work together to improve the welfare of learners; on-course achievement and attainment of learners.

'We have seen a big rise in the number of students who are coming to us with financial and mental health issues. We are all working hard to address this.'- Member of centralised support team

Most colleges engage well with learner representatives to identify emerging learner support needs and promote the range of services available. Students' associations make valuable formal and informal contributions to the planning of support services and to informing improvements based on learner feedback.

5.3 *How well do colleges work in partnership with other agencies to provide support for learning?*

All colleges have arrangements with a range of external agencies to provide learners with access to additional and specialised support services. These arrangements include referral to local drug and alcohol counselling services, and access to support agencies which deal with domestic violence including community police and disability support groups. In addition colleges have partnerships with national bodies including *Dyslexia Scotland* and *BRITE* to provide specialist support for learners and staff in overcoming additional barriers to learning. Most colleges liaise regularly with these organisations at

strategic and operational levels to keep up-to-date with changes to legislation and protocols which affect learners. Most colleges have experienced a reduction in the level of support offered by external partners as a result of financial constraints. In most cases this has reduced the availability of, and access to, specialist, external support services for learners. Almost all colleges are working more closely with Jobcentre Plus to alleviate financial pressures on learners in receipt of benefits. However, some colleges do not have sufficiently formal communication arrangements with local, external agencies to be able to plan effectively for changes to welfare which will affect learners.

'None of us are naturally expert at everything or have even, uncomplicated lives. Most, if not all of us, need some extra help at times to be able to achieve our individual goals and aspirations.'- College lecturer

All colleges are represented on one or more CPP. This is dependent on the location of the college, as in some regional areas colleges work with three or four CPPs. Most colleges take an active role in CPP sub-groups to explain and promote to partner agencies the range of services available to support young people and adults. For example, in one CPP area, the local college chairs a *Guidance and Support Group* which brings together providers of support services across a local authority area. These arrangements have a positive impact on sharing information across sectors and agencies and in planning cross-agency approaches to deal with collective issues.

Almost all colleges have well-established links with LAs to co-ordinate support for school-age learners and adults progressing from community-based programmes. There are many examples of colleges hosting events and activities to explain college provision to school staff, pupils, parents and carers. In most merged colleges, restructuring processes have resulted in staff undertaking new roles and responsibilities for communicating and liaising with partner agencies. In most of these colleges, staff appointed to these roles are establishing new and productive relationships with their partners in schools and LAs to support learners. Some colleges are providing an important catalyst for bringing together and engaging with a number of CPPs and LAs in coordinating support for learning.   These approaches are improving the level of knowledge of partners of the range of services provided by colleges to support learners.

Most colleges work well with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to co-ordinate transition to college programmes for young people who are at risk of not achieving a positive destination. Some colleges engage with SDS to deliver careers information, advice and guidance services. However, this varies across colleges, as some colleges employ their own staff to deliver careers guidance.

6   Delivery of services to support learning

6.1 *How well do colleges promote services to support learning?*

Overall, most colleges promote services to support learning well. However, the breadth of activities presents challenges for ensuring all learners across all campuses receive information about the full range of services. In recently-merged colleges, the merger process highlighted variations in approaches applied by legacy colleges to promote and publicise services. These variations highlighted disparities in the number of learners who self-referred early to access support services.   Support service teams that engage energetically and proactively with new learners have significantly higher numbers of learners disclosing barriers at an early stage of their programme. This was particularly apparent at one college where one campus had very high levels of early disclosure while another campus with a similar learner profile had very few. Overall, most colleges are not proactive in carrying out market research to identify the best ways of promoting services to learners.

Most colleges are proactive in carrying out assessments to ensure barriers to learning are identified at an early stage of a programme. In most colleges effective referral arrangements between teaching and support departments are enabling staff to coordinate and arrange appropriate support. Many colleges are making good use of induction programmes and the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to convey to learners and staff the range of services available. There are many good examples of colleges involving students' associations productively in promoting support services to learners.

The many colleges which have benefited from new estates and refurbishments have taken opportunities to position centralised support services in highly visible, accessible locations. There are examples of colleges applying creative approaches to raise the profile of support service teams across campuses. This includes, centralised support teams wearing brightly-coloured tee-shirts to provide learners with easily identifiable, first points of contact. These arrangements are working well.

Most colleges are proactive in explaining to schools, parents and LAs the range of support available to assist school pupils and school leavers. Some colleges are invited by LA and secondary schools to contribute to information events. A few colleges host events for schools staff to hear first-hand from support services staff about the range of services available to pupils and school leavers but these are often not well-attended. Overall, arrangements for conveying to external partners the wide range of support services available in colleges are not well developed. This reduces the effectiveness of colleges in ensuring potential learners receive sufficient, accurate information about the range of services available to support learning.

6.2 *How well do services to support learning meet the needs of learners?*

Services which contribute to the welfare of learners

Across all support for learning services, the quality of the professional relationships college staff establish with learners is pivotal to learners achieving a successful outcome and a positive destination. It is due to these productive relationships, that many learners are able to overcome their individual challenges to maintain their studies and progress successfully to further learning and employment. Almost all staff who are directly involved in contributing to the support of learners are committed, conscientious and work hard to enable learners to stay on course.

Over the last two years, shifts in the learner profile and changes to benefits arrangements have resulted in most learner finance and welfare support departments revising arrangements for supporting learners. In most colleges, this is providing a stronger focus on customer care and improved and more accessible arrangements for learners to access staff to discuss funding and financial issues. Most finance departments have extended their opening hours and are providing learners with opportunities to make appointments to meet with staff.

'For some learners, no matter how much they value their college place, being thrown out the family home or being pressured to go and get a job causes real issues. We as professionals need to acknowledge this and make sure that we do what we can to help them to stay.' – Support services team leader

Most merged colleges have experienced significant challenges in establishing MIS systems to accommodate cross-campus requirements. This has impacted on a range of services which contribute to the support of learners, including for example, arrangements for recording learner attendance in order to facilitate the disbursement of learner funds. During the fieldwork for this task, these colleges were at different stages of experiencing and, or resolving these issues and it was too early to forecast any impact on learners.

Across all colleges, changes to welfare systems are resulting in college staff working more closely with Jobcentre Plus to communicate and coordinate arrangements which impact on learner funding. In most colleges these arrangements work well. However, incremental changes to the benefit system are presenting challenges to colleges for ensuring learners receive accurate, up-to-date information about changes which will affect their level of financial support. This is particularly important for learners who are already attending college and whose benefits will be affected during their timescale of their programme. College staff report an increase in the number of young people who during their programme become estranged from their parents or carers and move out of their family home to live with other relatives or friends. These young people experience difficulties in obtaining documents to enable staff to process alterations to funding applications. Many colleges are experiencing significant pressures on learner support and hardship funds. Although all of

these issues are placing a substantial burden on colleges in relation to achieving high learner retention and success rates, almost all colleges are working proactively to help minimise risk to learners.

'I used to have teaching role, but I moved into student support some years ago. I wish as a teacher, I had known and understood the many issues and difficulties which some students experience just to get here. '- Support services manager

In all colleges, staff responsible for support services highlight a range of issues which, in their view, cause, and or contribute to, learners leaving programmes early. These are financial difficulties, anxiety, social and emotional issues and conflicting commitments, such as work or caring for others. The learners who met with inspectors also cited these issues as causing significant difficulties. Almost all colleges have increased access to counselling facilities to take account of the rise in the number of learners declaring a mental health issue. Most centralised services staff have good links with housing associations and advocate helpfully on behalf of learners.

Services which contribute to on-course achievement and attainment of learners

Over the last two years, almost all colleges have revised their approaches to supporting learners to achieve success on their programme. Some colleges continue to deploy teaching staff to undertake the role of *named tutor* to provide learners with on-course support. Others have established arrangements for allocating support staff a number of class groups to provide learners with access to holistic on-course and welfare support. These approaches are mostly working well and learners value the support they receive from their named member of staff. However, the increasing number of learners, particularly young people, who have additional needs, is placing considerable pressures on support services. As a result, some colleges are struggling to meet increased demand with limited resources. This is particularly apparent at specific points of the year when learner demand for support is higher.

'The one-to-one meetings we I have with my course tutor are really important to me. They help me to focus on what I am doing and where I am going.'- Learner on FE programme

Across most colleges, improvements to the MIS or VLE are enabling learners to access live data to take more responsibility for managing their own attendance and progress. These arrangements are working well and are resulting in learners taking earlier action to seek support when issues arise. The increase in the number of young people attending full-time college programmes has resulted in most colleges taking swifter action to address issues of late coming and non-attendance. This includes teaching and, or support staff using electronic systems to quickly text or phone learners who have not arrived for classes. Following analysis of learner retention rates, one college identified that attendance patterns in the first two week of a

programme provide a useful indicator of risk of withdrawal. It established a system which flags up learners at risk, which learner services and teaching staff use to target support and monitor attendance. These arrangements are helping to encourage and support learners to stay on course and to access additional support.

Almost all colleges assess the core skill levels of new learners to ensure they have the appropriate levels of skill to be able to achieve qualifications within a set timescale. Teaching departments make good use of this process to place learners on an appropriate level of programme. However, this process is highlighting a disparity between the levels of core skills identified by learners at application in comparison to the results of college assessments. This is resulting in some learners requiring to repeat core skill units to be able to meet the academic standards required within vocational programmes. This issue is connected to the quality of the information provided externally in relation to core skill components and levels within accredited vocational programmes. Some colleges are not taking sufficient action to convey to external bodies and influencers, including parents, the standards of literacy and numeracy required within vocational programmes and occupational areas.

Most teaching staff support learners well to achieve their individual goals. They provide useful support and advice during and outside class times to support learners to complete their programmes successfully. However, some teaching staff do not take sufficient account of the support needs of individual learners within classes. In most cases, this is as a result of teaching staff not applying a sufficient range of learning and teaching approaches to accommodate the diverse range of learner support needs within a class group setting. This area is worth further exploration as it may be a contributory factor in explaining why learners who have identified support needs do better in some subject areas than in others.

'We know that many learners who have additional barriers to learning do better in some subject areas than learners who do not have additional barriers. We need to be proactive and ask why?' - College manager

Across the college sector in 2012- 2013, of the learners undertaking a social subjects programme only 60% of learners who disclosed a disability completed their programme successfully. In science programmes, 69% of learners who disclosed a disability completed successfully in comparison to 80% who did not have a disability. In hairdressing, beauty and complementary therapies 72% of learners who disclosed a disability completed successfully which is 2% below the number of learners who did not have a disability. In hospitality and art design programmes, which attract high numbers of learners who disclose a disability, both have high levels of successful completion rates for learners with a disability at around 80%. This variation in the success rates of learners by subject area requires further examination. At present some colleges are not taking sufficient action to analyse and compare learner retention and success rates by disability at

programme and subject area to inform further investigation and planning for improvement.

The majority of teaching staff make good use of ICT, including the VLE to make learning engaging and accessible to learners. They upload class materials onto the VLE in advance and provide links for learners to access further resources to enhance their learning. Learners value greatly the ability to access materials out with classes to prepare for learning activities and revise for assessments. Learners who have additional barriers to learning, such as dyslexia, value being able to use the VLE to access learning in formats which ease access to learning. However, some teaching staff are not making class materials available on the VLE and are not making use of the VLE to encourage and help learners to engage in learning activities. This is impacting negatively on the quality of support for learners.

'The support I receive at college is liberating! ´Learner with cerebral palsy.

Almost all colleges have effective arrangements in place to support learners who require additional support to be able to engage in class activities. College staff responsible for coordinating additional support arrangements take good account of learner needs to enable individual learners and class groups to access support which is responsive and unobtrusive. Workshop and classroom assistants contribute well to providing a supportive and positive experience for learners. They provide helpful support which enables learners who have additional barrier to learning to engage in class activities and assessments.

In most colleges, a reduction in class-contact time for learners on full-time programmes is impacting on the time available for learners to access vocational equipment to practise and consolidate their skills. Most colleges have made alternative arrangements to provide additional opportunities for learners to develop these skills. This includes increased use of peer support activities and approaches which engage learners in taking more responsibility for practising skills and furthering their learning. In some colleges, this is contributing positively to improved arrangements for learners to take responsibility for their own learning.

Almost all colleges report that the low levels of literacy and numeracy skills of some school leavers present a significant barrier to learning, achievement and attainment. A few colleges express serious concern about the weak numeracy skills of learners at enrolment. They cite pressure on staff to improve learners' skill levels within a short timescale to enable them to attain vocational qualifications. Most colleges incorporate a blend of additional in-class support and support workshops out with class times to address this. However, a few colleges are not taking sufficient account of changes made by awarding bodies and employers in relation to the attainment of literacy and numeracy skills of learners. These colleges generally devolve responsibility for the achievement of these skills to teaching departments. In some colleges this presents challenges for teaching staff in supporting learners to achieve a sufficient level of literacy skills within the timescale of a programme.

Almost all colleges have positive and productive relationships with local secondary schools. In most colleges, staff liaise regularly with staff in schools to coordinate support arrangements and ease transition of young people to college programmes. In many colleges these arrangements work well. However, a few colleges do not have sufficiently systematic arrangements with LAs and, or schools to ensure college staff receive routinely, advance information about the support needs of individual pupils.   This includes being advised of looked after and accommodated young people and young carers and receiving appropriate background information about the support needs of pupils who have become disengaged from learning. A few colleges have appointed a named member of staff to facilitate this which is providing schools, social services and support agencies with a useful point of contact. This approach is helping to ensure improved sharing of information and coordination and planning of support for young people.

Services which contribute to progression to a positive destination

All colleges promote well to learners the opportunities for progression to employment and further learning. Most college programmes incorporate a range of activities which introduce learners to work and industry. Many vocational programmes include work-based experiences such as field visits to workplaces and input from industry representatives. However, some work placements are not sufficiently purposeful or engaging for learners and do not provide sufficient opportunities for learners to practise and apply vocational skills.

'The one-to-one meetings I have with my course tutor are really important to me. They help me to focus on what I am doing and where I am going.'- Learner on FE programme

Almost all colleges provide good arrangements for learners to meet with a named member of staff to reflect on and discuss their progress and future plans. Almost all colleges use approaches to engage learners in planning their own learning through devising an individual learning plan (ILP). Most learners who have additional barrier to learning, plan and record the support they receive using a personal learning support plan (PLSP). There are good examples of teaching and support staff working with learners to formulate these plans. Some plans include useful information for teachers about the types of learning and teaching approaches which are most suitable for supporting individual learners. Increased use of ICT has improved the quality and content of these plans. However, some plans need to reflect better the skills and attributes required for working in specific occupational areas.

All colleges provide a wide range of experiences and services which enable learners to explore opportunities for employment and further learning. These include visits to workplaces, educational institutions and industry events, opportunities to meet with employers and college workshops on interview and job-seeking skills. These arrangements encourage and support learners well to make choices about work and further study.   However, few colleges place

sufficient emphasis on developing the career management skills of learners to equip them for making on-going decisions about their future employment. This lack of focus on the development of career management skills is a missed opportunity. Colleges should consider the inclusion of career management skills as part of their approach to developing the essential skills of learners.

7 Arrangements for assuring and improving the quality of services to support learning

7.1 *How well do colleges reflect on the quality of services to support learning?*

Almost all merged colleges have engaged proactively in reviewing the support services delivered by each of the legacy colleges to determine new whole-college strategies for delivering support for learning. This has been a complex exercise which has revealed significant differences in the culture and approaches applied by each of the legacy colleges. These colleges are drawing effectively on these processes to inform future organisational structures, allocate resources and plan strategies to support learners.

In almost all colleges, staff teams evaluate the quality of support services. In colleges which have well-established arrangements for evaluating support services, staff teams apply these processes purposefully and productively to bring about improvements for learners. Almost all merged colleges are taking advantage of the opportunities presented by merger to revise evaluation processes based on best practice of the legacy colleges. Some colleges have introduced arrangements which require closer collaboration between teaching and support functions in evaluating the impact of support services.

There are some examples of managers responsible for curriculum and support services working well together to analyse the causes of learner withdrawal rates and drawing on the findings to improve programme design. However, overall there are insufficient arrangements for teaching and non-teaching staff to work collaboratively to improve the quality of services to support learning. Most college self-evaluation processes do not engage support staff sufficiently in focusing on and analysing the impact of support services on attendance, withdrawal and success rates of learners.

Colleges gather and use information about the withdrawal rates of learners to identify programmes which require improvement. However, most colleges do not have formal or systematic arrangements for teaching and support staff to work collaboratively to analyse the withdrawal and partial success rates of learners. Overall, teaching and support teams are not evaluating sufficiently the impact of support services in relation to attendance, withdrawal and success rates of learners.

Most colleges are increasingly sharing self-evaluation information with CPPs to help plan more cohesive support arrangements. Although in some areas this is working well, these arrangements are not yet widespread. Overall, colleges are not sufficiently proactive in conveying information to partners which would assist more joined-up approaches to the reviewing, planning and delivery of support within local and regional areas.

7.2 *How well do colleges engage stakeholders in improving the quality of services to support learning?*

Almost all colleges make good use of college-wide surveys to gather the views of learners on the quality of services to support learning. Most college departments which contribute to support for learning take good account of formal and informal feedback from learners when evaluating provision and services. However, often college-wide surveys focus on a wide range of college experiences which do not provide sufficiently in-depth feedback about the impact of support services on learner success rates. Many departments make good use of informal feedback from learners within their individual teams to plan for improvement. However, staff in some support departments do not have sufficiently formal arrangements to gather and use feedback from learners to inform improvements at strategic level.

There are some good examples of colleges working with receiving institutions, including universities and other colleges, to assess the impact of services on the progression of learners. These include staff in colleges which have articulation agreements with universities working with colleagues in universities to evaluate the preparedness of college HN learners to progress to degree-level study.

Some colleges are working increasingly with the *Equality Challenge Unit* (ECU) to inform improvements. There are many examples of staff in colleges engaging well with ECU to reduce the disparity in withdrawal and success rates between different groups of learners who have an additional barrier to learning.

7.3 *How well do colleges share knowledge and information about support for learning to benefit the wider community?*

Colleges gather a wide range of data about the learner population which could be of benefit to CPPs and wider communities. This includes: information on the literacy and numeracy levels of new learners; the identified additional support needs of learners by age, gender and SIMD; and the proportion of learners who are carers. Some colleges engage with CPP partners to share this information, but this is not common practice. This type of information would be of benefit to many partners at local, regional and national levels, not only for contributing to a shared approach, but also in helping them to understand the wide range of learner needs. Overall, colleges are not taking sufficient opportunities to convey to CPPs, the support needs profile of learners to assist future planning and to promote the work of colleges in supporting learners to learn.

8. Recommendations

Colleges should:

- take sufficient account of the external factors which may impact negatively on learner success rates when planning services to support learning;
- convey to all staff, their collective role and contribution in supporting learners to complete their programme successfully and progress to a positive destination;
- ensure all teaching staff undertake appropriate CPD to be able to apply a sufficient range of learning and teaching approaches to accommodate a diverse range of learner needs within a group setting;
- take action to analyse and compare learner retention and success rates by disability at programme and subject area to inform further investigation and planning for improvement;
- consider the inclusion of career management skills as part of an approach to developing the essential skills of learners; and
- take opportunities to convey to CPPs, the support needs profiles of learners to assist future planning and to promote the work of colleges in supporting learners to succeed.

Education Scotland should:

- monitor and review progress of colleges on achieving these recommendations;
- explore more fully with colleges differences in learner success rates for learners with a disability across subject areas; and
- work with other post-16 educational sectors to inform them of the findings of this report and engage them in working towards delivery of the recommendations.

College Development Network should:

- support colleges in working with external bodies to respond to the changes to welfare arrangements and to develop the skill levels of teaching and support staff further to meet the wide range of learner support needs.

Appendix 1

Glossary of terms

BRITE	Beattie Resources for Inclusiveness in Technology and Education
CDN	College Development Network
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CPP	Community Planning Partnership
ECU	Equality Challenge Unit
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
HND	Higher National Diploma
ICT	Information and communication technology
ILP	Individual learning plan
LA	Local Authority
MIS	Management Information Systems
PLSP	Personal learning support plan
SDS	Skills Development Scotland
SIMD	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

Appendix 2

Colleges which contributed to the fieldwork for this report

- Ayrshire College
- City of Glasgow College
- Dumfries and Galloway College
- Fife College
- Perth College

Colleges whose External Review and AEV reports contributed to this report

External review

- Borders College
- Dundee and Angus College
- Lews Castle College UHI
- Moray College UHI
- Orkney College UHI
- Sabhal Mor Ostaig
- Shetland College UHI
- SRUC (Scotland's Rural College)
- West Highland College UHI

Annual engagement visits

- Forth Valley College
- Glasgow Clyde College
- Glasgow Kelvin College
- Newbattle Abbey College
- New College Lanarkshire
- North East Scotland College
- West College Scotland

Appendix 3

Useful resources

We have a number of resources available from our website which you may find useful.

Meeting the needs of learners and employers through effective planning, application and admission processes in Scotland's colleges (Education Scotland 2014)
Maximising Learner Success (Education Scotland 2014)
Colleges and community planning (Education Scotland 2013)
Learning to improve the lives and aspirations of young people in Scotland (Education Scotland 2012)
Essential Skills in Scotland's Colleges (Education Scotland 2012)

The Journey to Excellence
http://www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk/index.asp
An online digital resource for professional development which contains movies which exemplify aspects of excellence across a wide range of education sectors and partner agencies, summaries of educational research and the perspectives of well-known national figures and educational professionals and researchers.