

12 September 2023

Derek Smeall
Principal and Chief Executive
Glasgow Kelvin College

Dear Mr Smeall,

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited Glasgow Kelvin College in May 2023 to undertake a Progress Visit. During our visit, we talked to learners, staff, and stakeholders, and worked closely with the senior managers.

The team found the following major strengths in the college's work:

Recruitment

Positive partnerships between college staff and stakeholders have increased awareness amongst potential learners of the opportunities available at the college. As a consequence, rates of learner recruitment have increased across most programme areas. Staff have made adjustments to recruitment arrangements, including the removal of the need for formal interview for some courses. This has resulted in potential learners benefitting from more timely responses to their applications and enables successful applicants to make early arrangements to accommodate commitments. There are good partnership arrangements in place with local charitable organisations to enable community learners to progress to mainstream programmes. A short online introduction to the use of digital resources is offered to all successful applicants before starting their college programme. This is supporting learners well to refresh and extend their digital skills in preparation for engaging in learning activities. The services to support learning team engages well with applicants who disclose a need for additional support. Staff coordinate support throughout the recruitment and initiate an independent learning plan. Learners report they feel more confident about starting their course as a result. More extensive and effective use of social media is raising the profile of the college amongst younger people, schools, and local communities. This has had a positive impact on improving recruitment to some programme areas. All curriculum teams have taken action to improve the recruitment of learners from hard-to-reach groups. This includes delivering a range of community projects that successfully attract and recruit speakers of other languages, care experienced young people, and learners from minority ethnic groups.

Retention

Rates of learner withdrawal for part-time Further Education (FE) programmes have been better than national performance level for the past three years. Senior leaders have identified learner retention as a key priority in supporting improvement in attainment. Staff in curriculum and support teams have responded well by implementing a range of approaches and interventions. In the early stages of programme delivery, curriculum teams support learners to transfer to a different level or type of programme. This is helping to ensure that learners are retained on a programme that is appropriate. The college Digital Transformation strategy is impacting positively on the learner experience. Almost all

learners have a good understanding of the Virtual Learning Environments available. Staff use an extended induction process well to support learners develop a range of skills and build resilience to cope with their programme. Staff make effective use of arrangements to monitor and track individual learner progress and identify those at risk of withdrawal. A recently appointed retention improvement manager monitors attendance and works productively with curriculum teams to identify and engage with learners at risk of withdrawal. Staff teams have drawn constructively on findings from previous evaluations to determine strategies to improve retention. Managers empower curriculum teams to make changes to course content and delivery arrangements to meet the needs of learners.

Attainment

Almost all curriculum areas have introduced changes to programme design that are helping to improve attainment. These include condensing programmes across fewer weeks, scheduling practical activity at the beginning of programmes, and increasing the use of integrated assessment and project-based learning. Learners are very complimentary about the high level of support they receive from teaching staff throughout their time at college. Almost all learners value the advice and insight they receive from visiting industry professionals and former learners to explore and widen their career aspirations and reinforce their commitment to succeed. The college has established productive partnerships with a wide range of local, regional, and national employers. Curriculum managers work effectively with these employers to design and offer programmes that benefit learners and industry. College managers have introduced comprehensive quality arrangements and a planning cycle to evaluate the learner experience and plan for improvement. This approach is working well across all curriculum and support areas.

Progression

College programmes offer a wide range of options for learners to progress from FE level programmes to higher levels of study. Partnership arrangements with universities and local colleges are providing learners with good opportunities to progress. The overall number of full-time college leavers who progressed to Higher Education (HE) programmes is better than the sector average. The Gradu8 programme is supporting S3 pupils well to make informed choices about undertaking a college programme. A range of taster sessions is supporting learners well to explore and work towards a pathway that meets their specific aspirations. Many learners on community-based programmes benefit from access to learning on college campuses. This is helping to build learner confidence to progress from informal to formal learning opportunities. A recently introduced management information system is producing useful real-time data to inform college strategies and improvements. Senior staff are making good use of this facility to inform future curriculum design, determine evaluation and review arrangements, and plan approaches to improve retention and attainment.

The following areas for improvement were identified by the team and discussed with the senior managers:

- Some learners, particularly those from the Easterhouse and East End campuses, experience difficulties in providing the evidence required by funding bodies to access student funding. This is impacting negatively on recruitment for these learners.

- Rates of learner withdrawal for full-time programmes, and part-time HE programmes have been higher than national average performance levels for the last three years.
- The Students' Association (SA) is not sufficiently visible to learners and is not able to fully represent their views.
- Class representatives are not sufficiently aware of their role and its intended purpose. Many class representatives have not yet accessed the online training available, and many were unaware of its existence.
- Most learners report that the MyKelvin app is difficult to use and unreliable. They highlight that the app sometimes provides inconsistent timetabling information which impacts negatively on their attendance.
- Overall rates of learner success are below national average performance levels.
- The overall rate of success for learners from an ethnic minority background, learners with a disability, and care-experienced learners is lower than the national average performance level.
- Staff awareness of the college's essential skills policy is not sufficiently comprehensive to fully support the development of meta skills across the curriculum.
- Arrangements to identify the development needs of teaching staff to inform and drive improvement in learning and teaching are not yet sufficiently comprehensive.
- Some learners at Haghill campus are using digital devices which they find unfit for purpose and complex to use.

The following main points for action are required:

- College managers should improve rates of learner retention and attainment across all curriculum areas.
- The college should raise learner awareness of the Students' Association and its role in improving the learning experience.

What happens next?

We recognise the progress made against most aspects for improvement, however further progress is required in a number of areas. We will ask for a report on progress on these areas for improvement to be provided to the college link HM Inspector within agreed timescales. Taking account of the progress report, we will then decide what further engagement with the college may be required.

Barbara Nelson
HM Inspector