

30 July 2024

Liz Connolly
Principal & Chief Executive
West College Scotland

Dear Ms Connolly,

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited West College Scotland in May 2024 to undertake an Annual Engagement 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:

Learner progress and outcomes.

The overall rate of successful completion for learners on full-time further education (FE) programmes have been above the sector norm for the last three years and in AY 2022/23 attainment further improved. The overall rate for learner withdrawals for part-time Higher Education (HE) programmes have been lower than the sector norm for the last three years. Learner withdrawal rates in AY 2022/23 for learners who are from the most deprived postcode areas, or who have a disability, or who are care experienced are lower than sector norms. Success rates for these learners have also improved. Senior managers have continued to invest constructively in support services which help learners complete their programmes. Support services have responded well to an increase in demand for assistance. Success rates for learners from lower SIMD deciles, care experienced learners, learners from an ethnic minority and learners with a declared disability have improved. Senior managers monitor performance indicator (PI) information and learner feedback well and are aware of the areas which need particular support.

Approaches to assuring and enhancing the quality of learning and teaching including professional updating.

Most teaching staff hold the Teaching Qualification in Further Education (TQFE) or equivalent. Lecturing staff are provided with appropriate opportunities to share and learn from good practice, and to access appropriate professional learning activities around learning, teaching, assessment, and support. Managers and staff feel empowered to make changes to programmes and delivery to improve the learner experience. Curriculum teams engage directly with employers and use this autonomy well. They use feedback from employers well to design and deliver appropriate programmes. Staff, in the majority of curriculum areas are making effective use of college data and learner feedback. This is helping staff make informed decisions and implement changes based on evidence. Lecturers in almost all areas have embraced the delivery of meta-skills well.

Learner Engagement

The Student Association (SA) area represented on the Board and key college groups. The SA have supported well the recruitment of class representatives, and these are in place for the majority of full-time class groups. The majority of learners are satisfied with teaching staff and speak positively about their lecturers who they find are approachable, helpful, and supportive. This enables learners to seek help when needed and improves their experience and outcomes. In the majority of areas, learners have appropriate opportunities to provide feedback to curriculum teams through informal discussion, surveys, and engagement at curriculum team meetings. Subsequently, student voice is influencing and informing improvements to delivery of the curriculum and the wider learning experience. The Active Sports Coordinator has increased the range of participation opportunities for students and staff. These opportunities are valued and are helping improve the physical and mental wellbeing of students and staff. In addition, it has created a stronger sense of community throughout the college.

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

- There are several subject areas where learner retention and success rates are low and require improvement
- Teaching staff are overly reliant on prompting from curriculum and quality leaders (CQLs) regarding learner personal learning support plans (PLSP) information. In a few cases this has resulted in staff being unaware of individual learner needs and therefore not able to make the necessary adjustments.
- Arrangements for the systematic review of learning and teaching are not sufficiently consistent. It is unclear how the college wide development of learning and teaching is progressing.
- College managers and the SA have been unable to recruit and retain an appropriate number of sabbatical officers. This has impacted on opportunities for social activities, campaigns, and the sharing of responsibilities across a wider group of officers.
- Learner participation in the Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey is very low, at 26.9% for FE and 18.9% for HE.
- Most learners are not aware of the role and purpose of the SA

Main points for action

- The college should continue to address low rates of learner attainment in part-time FE and full-time HE provision.
- Senior managers should ensure the plans for the improved support for the Students Association are delivered and monitored.

What happens next?

We are confident that the college has made satisfactory progress and has the capacity to continue to improve. We will continue to monitor progress with regular contact through the link HM Inspector.

Dr John Laird
HM Inspector