

4 July 2023

Angela Cox  
Principal and Chief Executive  
Ayrshire College

Dear Ms Cox

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited Ayrshire College in May 2023 to undertake an Annual Engagement Visit (AEV). 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**

Across a number of curriculum areas, staff support school-based learners to engage in short taster sessions. This is supporting young people well to make informed choices about the next steps in their learning. In response to an overall downturn in recruitment to full-time programmes, the college has targeted growth in part-time provision and recruitment is now above pre-pandemic levels. Curriculum teams provide bespoke induction and include activities that increase learner awareness of college services. All learners find the college application process easy to complete and online information supports potential learners well to access college services and support recruitment. Social media campaigns are evaluated effectively through user engagements to understand what works well. The college has a working group, in which teaching, and support staff work together well to plan and design helpful support activities that help learners with the transition to college. All curriculum teams use data and learner feedback well to review recruitment approaches. This has positively impacted on learner early retention.

### **Retention**

Rates of partial success for full-time programmes are well below sector norms. Most learners who remain at the college successfully complete their programme. The introduction and effective promotion of an Information Hub in each college campus supports learners well in accessing and making use of college support services. Software used by most learners is cloud-based to reduce the need for high specification digital devices and to provide all learners with consistent digital platforms. A Thriving Community Fund is helping learners experiencing financial hardship and is supporting them to remain on college programmes. Curriculum teams reflect well on performance data and learner feedback to introduce relevant changes to programme design and delivery that encourages learners to remain at college.

### **Attainment**

Overall success rates on further education (FE) programmes have remained steady despite an increase in the number of learners leaving their programme early. The overall college student satisfaction survey results are high at 95%. All staff in the Learner Resource Centre

work collaboratively with other support and teaching staff to provide a good range of supportive online learning resources for learners. Staff ensure that work placement experiences and project-based learning activities help develop learners' meta skills and support learners to evidence competence using e-portfolios. Learners comment that they benefit from regular one-to-one meetings held with lecturers that provide constructive feedback and advice on progress. Staff make good use of performance data to identify those individuals who are at risk of not completing their programme, and to introduce tailored support arrangements.

## Progression

Almost all successful learners enter a positive destination on completion of their college programme. Most managers have developed appropriate pathways into further study and employment options. Curriculum teams involve employers and external partners productively in supporting and encouraging learners to explore future progression pathways and potential career choices. Almost all curriculum staff use labour market intelligence (LMI) well to develop programmes that help to prepare learners for transition into employment. Most college staff prepare learners well for progress into the world of work by developing CV writing skills, interview skills and by providing industry insights. All learners are aware of their progression routes and have discussions with lecturing staff about next steps, their expectations, and how to achieve them. Learners feel well supported and encouraged by staff to pursue their aspirations.

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

- Recruitment to full-time programmes has decreased significantly from pre-pandemic levels.
- Overall rates of learner withdrawal for most modes of delivery are very high.
- Approaches to delivering shorter, industry-focussed programmes are not yet fully consistent across all curriculum areas.
- Overall attainment rates for higher education (HE) programmes have declined significantly.
- Staff do not have access to a reliable, single source of data regarding learner progress.
- In many programmes, the delivery of core and essential skills is not sufficiently contextualised to make it relevant to the curriculum areas and learners.
- The learner participation rate for the SFC Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey (SSES) 2020/21 is 10% lower than the sector norm.

The following main points for action were identified:

- The college should take action to improve rates of successful completion, and in particular address the number of learners who leave their programme early.
- The college should ensure staff have access to comprehensive and reliable information to support systematic evaluation to secure improvement.

### **What happens next?**

We recognise the progress made against most aspects for improvement, however further progress is required in improving outcomes for learners. We will ask for a report on progress on the agreed 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 is required.

**Joe Mulholland**  
**HM Inspector**