

16 January 2024

Mr Peter Smith
Principal
Borders College

Dear Mr Smith

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited Borders college in November 2023 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 rates of successful completion for learners on full time further education (FTFE) and higher education (HE) are above the sector norm. Rates of successful completion for learners on part time HE programmes have remained higher than sector norm for the past four years. In most subject areas, learner successful completion rates are higher than sector norm. Rates of successful completion for learners from key equalities groups who declare a disability and for learners who identify as female are above the sector norm.

Learners have access to a wide range of effective learner support arrangements and associated facilities. Helpful contributions from well being student support officers, learning support and e-learning support staff ensures many learners succeed on their programme. Heads of Sector make good use of college systems to review the college curriculum and plan for improvement. This includes analysis of live data which helps to identify learners with additional support requirements and supports timely interventions to help them remain on college programmes.

Staff engage well with college self-evaluation activities and demonstrate a good understanding of how to plan for improvement. College managers are focussing improvement efforts in subject areas which have low success rates and are leading the curriculum review process well. They make effective use of college systems to plan and implement a curriculum offer which supports learners to follow appropriate articulation, employment and progression pathways.

Meta skills are embedded and signposted within programmes and this supports learners to identify and promote these skills to prospective employers. The introduction of a new virtual learning environment (VLE) is supporting learners well to record wider skills for learning and employment through an online digital portfolio. This supports learners in preparing for interviews and towards achieving a positive destination on leaving college.

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) and engage well in professional training and updating. College managers support staff to take part in informal peer review and team-teaching experiences where they share teaching practice. Almost all teaching staff undertake regular performance development review to plan for their individual professional learning needs. Appropriate professional mentoring arrangements are in place to support new teaching staff in developing their learning and teaching approaches. These structured review arrangements support staff to access professional development resources to increase awareness of approaches to support learners.

The college has invested significantly in an immersive classroom environment. Although at an early stage, use of this digital resource is enhancing learning, teaching and assessment approaches. Core skills staff liaise with curriculum staff and a team teaching approach ensures core skills assessments are embedded appropriately within lessons and supports learners to achieve. Curriculum staff and commercial managers work well with subject specific external partners to improve outcomes for learners and to share highly effective practice. These arrangements support the development of a current and appropriate curriculum portfolio which provides progression pathways for learners.

Learner Engagement

Borders College Students' Association (BCSA) is well represented at college board meetings and across all strategic committees. BCSA officers feel well prepared to take part in college meetings and their contributions are listened to and acted upon. Feedback from learners is used well to inform improvements to learning and teaching approaches. Learner representatives attend course team meeting reviews where they contribute to curriculum improvements and planning of activities to support their peers. Achievement Coaches provide discreet and bespoke support for learners who are reluctant to disclose additional learning requirements. Learners feel they are listened to and value the opportunity to suggest improvements in learning and teaching practice. Curriculum staff arrange industrial placements for learners and have in place a range of partnerships with local employers. Learners value the skills and practical experience they gain from these placements and appreciate opportunities to progress to paid employment.

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

- Rates of successful completion for care experienced learners and school-aged learners on part-time FE programmes are significantly below the sector norm
- The number of learner representatives is low and only around half have undertaken training to perform their roles effectively.

Main points for action

None identified.

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 through on-going engagement with the college link HM Inspector.

Sarah Halliwell
HM Inspector

cc Chair of College Board, SFC Outcome Agreement Manager