

2 May 2023

Stella McManus
Principal and Chief Executive
South Lanarkshire College

Dear Ms McManus,

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited South Lanarkshire College in March 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

Staff use recently revised admissions procedures to support learners well throughout the application process. Learners are encouraged to highlight support needs, and support staff work collaboratively with teaching departments to ensure support arrangements are in place at the start of programmes. Prior to the start of programmes, most curriculum teams provide good opportunities for learners to get to know teaching staff and other learners and familiarise themselves with the college facilities. Learner feedback is used effectively by staff to inform and influence the redesign and development of college services including the college website and admission arrangements. All curriculum teams make effective use of labour market intelligence (LMI), employer feedback and information from secondary schools to plan and adjust programmes to meet the needs of learners. All teaching departments work responsively and flexibly to meet the needs of employers and local communities. This has increased the levels of recruitment to part-time FE programmes and Modern Apprenticeships. Partnership working with external stakeholders has significantly increased the recruitment of learners whose first language is not English.

Retention

The overall rate of learner withdrawal for full-time further education (FE) programmes is 5% lower than the sector norm. Curriculum teams make effective use of newly introduced college systems to monitor and evaluate learner performance. Staff make good use of this facility to intervene early and support learners to stay at college. Almost all learners value the flexibility, enthusiasm, and responsiveness of teaching staff to meet their individual needs. Staff in almost all curriculum areas make good use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) to support learners out with class times. Teaching departments make good use of opportunities to share effective practice in curriculum planning and design. Arrangements are in place to support learners experiencing significant financial hardship, including provision of free breakfasts and lunches. In all curriculum areas learners provide purposeful feedback on their learning experience. Support Services staff make good use of neurodiversity training to meet the varied needs of learners and provide good access to a range of services to support wellbeing.

Attainment

The overall rates of attainment for part-time FE, and HE learners are high and above sector norms. Curriculum managers have autonomy to design curriculum flexibly and ensure that programmes align with the requirements of learners and key stakeholders. They adjust programmes promptly to respond to changing needs. All curriculum areas use alternative assessment arrangements effectively to ensure learners have the opportunity to successfully achieve their qualification. Most teaching staff are continuing to develop and use portfolio and project-based assessment methods to motivate learners and minimise any assessment burden. In a few curriculum areas, the incorporation of meta-skills within lessons is supporting learners well. Student services staff make effective use of a texting service to encourage those who may be at risk of withdrawal to continue on their programme. All learners have access to a class representative and learners undertaking this role benefit from the support they receive from the college. Learners provide useful feedback to staff on the delivery of summative assessments and staff adjust assessment strategies in response to learner views. Staff are making effective use of college data systems to better target support for learners that have protected characteristics or are experiencing hardship.

Progression

Almost all learners enter a positive destination on completion of their college programme. Most teaching teams provide learners with well-planned opportunities for work-based experience to enable learners to gain hands-on experience in industry. All curriculum areas incorporate input from external partners to provide learners with insight into the range of industry and academic options. Staff support learners well to plan, apply, and prepare for progression to employment or further study at college or university. Learners draw productively on their engagement with external partners to increase their knowledge of work standards and practices and extend their awareness of career pathways. Learners report high levels of satisfaction with the quality of their learning and the guidance they receive from academic and support staff. Almost all curriculum teams draw constructively on feedback from industry to adjust the curriculum and support progression to employment.

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

- The incorporation of meta skills within programmes is at an early stage of development in most curriculum areas.
- The overall rate of learner attainment on full-time FE programmes has declined and the number of learners completing with partial success has increased.
- The participation rate for the SFC Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey (SSES) is lower than the sector norm. Satisfaction rates from learners who responded are below the sector norm.

Main points for action

No main points for action were identified.

What happens next?

We are confident that the college has the capacity to continue to improve. We will continue to monitor progress through on-going engagement with the college link HM Inspector.

Joe Mulholland
HM Inspector