

8 August 2023

Dr Paul Little
Principal and Chief Executive
City of Glasgow College

Dear Dr Little,

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited City of Glasgow on 26 April 2023 to undertake the Annual Engagement Visit at the college. During our visit we spoke to learners, staff, stakeholders, and managers of the college.

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

Recruitment

Curriculum teams host a range of informative events, including taster sessions and visits to departmental facilities for learners undertaking community programmes and those who have disengaged from compulsory education. This supports potential learners to make informed choices about their programme of study when transitioning to college-based programmes. A suite of online materials produced by staff in the college's Student Experience team provides potential applicants with accessible and comprehensive information about the application and recruitment processes. Support services staff work effectively with curriculum teams to ensure that learners who disclose an additional support need receive relevant information and assistance during the recruitment process. The Students' Association (SA) worked collaboratively with managers to embed Freshers' Week into the college welcome and induction activities. This helps learners to integrate academic and social activities early in their studies. College managers have updated the arrangements for entry to college programmes in response to feedback from learners. Group information sessions have replaced individual interviews, providing better opportunities for applicants to learn about the content and requirements of their programme prior to enrolment.

Retention

Rates of learner withdrawal for full-time programmes over time have been lower than national performance levels. Rates of learner early withdrawal have reduced over the past two years and have returned to pre-pandemic levels. Curriculum staff engage effectively with external industry and education partners to maintain their subject expertise and network of contacts with employers and other partners. They draw effectively on these activities to embed current industry practice within learning and teaching. The new college Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) prepares and supports learners well to engage with hybrid delivery approaches. Almost all learners make good use of the VLE mobile application and find it helpful and easy to use. Learners use this application well to keep track of assessment dates and other information relating to progress with their studies. The college provides a range of support to assist learners experiencing financial hardship. This includes providing all learners with access to a free breakfast, a dry food pantry, advice on

cost savings and referrals to external organisations to provide further support. These arrangements are helping learners to continue their studies and are impacting positively on withdrawal rates. Curriculum staff use a range of early interventions for learners at risk of early withdrawal. If an issue affects a whole class, the college provides a range of supported workshops and team building exercises to help learners work more collaboratively together.

Attainment

Rates of learner successful completion over time for most modes of attendance have been above national performance levels. Most curriculum areas use hybrid delivery models effectively to provide learners with a choice of learning environments. This is helping learners to develop their full potential and is contributing positively to attainment. Almost all learners report that assessment feedback from teaching staff is timely and comprehensive. Staff work well with partner agencies to provide learners with access to external specialist support services. These agencies support learners who are facing personal issues effectively to achieve their qualification. In a few programme areas, teaching staff use peer observations effectively to improve attainment. However, arrangements for the recording and sharing of improvements are mainly informal. A detailed performance dashboard supports managers and staff well to monitor the performance of each college programme in real time. Managers make effective use of this system to analyse key performance measures and initiate actions to improve learner attainment.

Progression

Curriculum teams support learners progressing from community provision to college-based programmes effectively, helping them to feel comfortable in a college setting. Learner progression to a positive destination is high. In 2020/21, 98% of learners progressed to a positive destination on leaving college, with around 25% progressing to employment. Learners on most programmes benefit from work experience opportunities. This experience supports learners to develop and apply practical skills and establish professional networks that help them make informed decisions about future employment. All learners who indicate that they wish to leave their programme early are offered an impartial career guidance meeting with an external agency, and the offer a place to return to college. These discussions help learners to plan their employment and study options more effectively. Stop-Check-Support meetings at the end of each teaching block help curriculum teams to identify issues affecting learner progress and progression. Curriculum teams use this information well along with the results of learner surveys to inform improvement action plans. Some curriculum teams make good use of labour market information, Skills Development Scotland data and regional skills assessments to inform recruitment and progression strategies. However, this is not consistent across all curriculum areas.

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

- Rates of learner withdrawal for part-time programmes over time are higher than national performance levels.

- Overall, learners are not aware of the Student Association website, or the positive work carried out by the Student Association. Almost all class representatives are not clear about their responsibilities, and more than half have not received training for their role.
- The delivery of meta skills is not yet embedded fully across all programme areas.
- Overall, the rate of successful learner completion for full-time further education programmes has declined over time.

What happens next?

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

Ian Beach
HM Inspector