

16 July 2024

Mr Jim Metcalfe
Principal and Chief Executive
Fife College

Dear Mr Metcalfe,

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited Fife College on 01 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 part-time further education (FE) programmes has been above the sector norm for the last five years. Data for AY 2022/23 indicates that the successful completion rate for these learners has increased slightly. The overall rate of successful completion for learners on part-time higher education (HE) programmes in AY 2021/22 is above the sector norm. However, data indicates that the part-time HE successful completion rate decreased in AY 2022/23. Rates of learner attainment for full-time FE programmes have improved over the last three years but remain below the sector norm. The college works effectively with 18 secondary schools and the overall number of school pupils progressing to full-time college programmes is higher than the sector norm. Individual Learner Reviews are used well by almost all curriculum teams to monitor learner progress and support the needs of learners. Teaching staff work well with attendance advisors to ensure that attendance is monitored, and appropriate interventions are put in place to support learners. Student support teams develop useful QR codes to improve learner access to support services. Use of these codes has increased the number of learners who self-refer to access support services and personal learning support plans (PLSPs). Learners who have limited access to digital devices are provided with a suitable resource through a digital project. This is helping those learners experiencing digital poverty to fully engage with their programmes.

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 and all staff undertake an annual professional development review (PDR) to identify their professional learning requirements. Staff are encouraged and supported well to participate in professional work experience as part of these arrangements. Effective arrangements are in place to ensure all staff complete mandatory professional learning activities. These include trauma-informed approaches to teaching practice, carrying out awkward conversations, and mental health first aid. This allows staff to keep their learning and teaching up to date with current practices. Curriculum managers engage effectively with staff, learners, and stakeholders, including learner representatives and employers to influence learning and teaching approaches. College managers use a range of approaches to capture the student

voice. As a result, the student voice is influencing and informing improvements to delivery of the curriculum and the wider learning experience. The majority of curriculum teams develop effective partnerships with industry and external stakeholders and draw on these relationships to develop progression pathways and employment opportunities for learners. This is improving learners' experiences and outcomes. College managers have developed a performance indicator (PI) dashboard that incorporates live data and college sector comparators. The dashboard allows effective interrogation of data to support evaluation and planning for improvement.

Learner Engagement

The Students' Association (SA) contributes effectively to college committees, including the board of management. Student presidents feel their presence at meetings is valued and that their contributions are listened to and acted upon. The SA reports that in 2023/24 it recruited around 450 class representatives. Around half of class representatives have completed at least the basic level of optional, online training to prepare them for contributing purposefully to evaluation and planning for improvement. The majority of learners feel that their views are valued and that they can engage positively in shaping their own learning and teaching. The majority of learners are satisfied with their programmes and speak positively about staff whom they find approachable, helpful, and supportive. A few learners report that some staff provide high levels of support, including helping them to find employment opportunities and providing one-to-one support when needed. The majority of learners value being able to influence class timings, how they are taught, or the scheduling of assessments.

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

- Despite improvement over the last three years, rates of learner attainment for full-time FE programmes remain below the sector the norm.
- Rates of learner attainment for full-time HE programmes have declined over the last three years and are below the sector norm.
- Successful completion rates for key groups of learners (from the most deprived postcode areas; who have declared a disability; who are care experienced or from an ethnic minority background) have declined and are all below sector norms.
- There is no college wide strategy in place to systematically evaluate learning and teaching approaches to ensure standards of delivery are consistent across the college.
- There are no college-wide arrangements for identifying and sharing effective practice in improving outcomes for learners.
- Staff in most departments are not making effective use of the PI dashboard to interrogate data to support evaluation and plan for improvement.
- There is no college-wide strategy for the development of learners' wider skills, including meta-skills.

Main points for action

- The college should put in place systematic, college-wide arrangements to evaluate learning and teaching to support improvement and ensure that the quality of delivery is consistent across the college.

What happens next?

We recognise the progress made against most aspects for improvement, however further progress is required. We will require a report on progress on the agreed area 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.

Margaret Rose Livingstone
HM Inspector