

23 July 2024

Neil Cowie
Principal and Chief Executive
North East Scotland College

Dear Mr Cowie,

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited North East Scotland College in 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

Overall rates of successful learner completion for all full-time programmes have increased and are around or above the sector average. Overall rates of learner withdrawal are significantly lower than sector averages. Overall rates of learner completion with partial success for full-time learners show significant improvement and are now above sector averages. College staff work well to promote the Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey (SSES) and have a participation rate that is significantly higher than the sector average. Learner satisfaction rates are also high and above the sector average. College staff use a variety of helpful approaches to meet the increasingly complex and often multiple needs of learners. Curriculum staff use a range of activities to support transition for school pupils starting college. All learners have good opportunities to declare any additional support needs before starting college or during their programme. Curriculum and support staff collaborate well to identify and put support in place to support learners to succeed.

Approaches to assuring and enhancing the quality of learning and teaching including professional updating

Managers recognise well, the need to provide new teaching staff with the skills for learning and teaching. Almost all teaching staff engage well in annual professional development review to reflect on their teaching practice and set objectives for improvement through professional development. Observations of learning and teaching are used regularly by college staff to enhance learning and teaching practice. Lesson observations also contribute to curriculum spotlight reviews to identify improvement in the learner experience. Some teaching staff engage well with industry representatives to develop their learning and teaching approaches. Teaching staff engage well in college-wide arrangements for the evaluation of learning and teaching. Managers use these evaluations effectively to inform reviews of programme performance and take action to improve the quality of learning and teaching. Digital enhancement team staff work cohesively with teaching staff to develop resources for remote learning and for learners accessing the virtual learning environment (VLE). This provides teaching staff with opportunities to adapt their lesson approaches to the preferred learning preferences of their class groups.

Learner Engagement

Students' association (SA) team members attend classes at the start of programmes to introduce themselves to learners. A range of promotional activities such as videos, VLE messages and social media posts, help to increase awareness of the SA to learners. The majority of learners know of the SA and what their role is at the college. The SA host monthly class representative meetings, and actions are taken to curriculum committee meetings by the regional president. College managers chair well-planned curriculum spotlight review meetings to identify areas for improvement. Key performance indicators are understood well by curriculum staff. Learner feedback is gathered effectively using a range of mechanisms. Learners feel their input is valued and any changes made are fed back to them. Almost all learners speak highly of the support their academic tutors provide during weekly meetings. All curriculum managers engage purposefully with professional learning on trauma-informed practice. Managers value this training and comment that it helps them to understand and adjust programmes to accommodate learner needs.

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

- Rates of completion with partial success for learners on part-time programmes have increased.
- Teaching staff do not always have sufficient time or opportunity to reflect on and engage with, the updating of their professional subject knowledge and skills.
- The majority of class representatives have not received training to support them to carry out their role.

Main points for action

There are no main points for action.

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 with regular contact through the link HM Inspector.

Joe Mulholland
HM Inspector