

15 August 2023

Ms Audrey Cumberford
Principal and Chief Executive
Edinburgh College

Dear Ms Cumberford

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited Edinburgh College on 31 May 2023 to undertake the Progress Visit (PV) 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

The college approach to widening access is supporting equality of opportunity for all learners and is having a positive impact on recruitment which has continued to rise over a 5-year period. Most curriculum areas maintain communication with successful applicants prior to enrolment and new learners benefit from access to a range of useful induction information and resources to prepare them for starting their programme. Curriculum teams design and apply recruitment approaches to ensure that applicants are placed on an appropriate type and level of programme. These include delivering taster sessions to enable learners to sample programme content, assessing levels of meta skills and providing individual interviews with staff. Curriculum teams work productively to design and introduce new programmes to respond to interest and demand from learners and external partners. Marketing staff make effective use of social media to promote the college in a targeted way to potential and current learners. Curriculum teams monitor programme recruitment levels regularly and implement appropriate actions when levels fall below identified targets.

Retention

Teaching staff use arrangements for tracking learner attendance and progress well to identify learners who may be at risk of withdrawal. Most teams are making good use of this facility to implement early interventions to encourage and support learners to continue on their programme. Curriculum teams take good account of LMI, local and national policies, and key strategic drivers to design programmes that equip learners with the knowledge and skills needed to progress to work or further study. Most programmes make effective use industry-related certificates to prepare learners for the workplace. Staff continue to provide digital devices for learners who are experiencing digital poverty to enable them to participate fully in class activities. Almost all teams have a focus on improving retention. Curriculum and support staff are making more effective use of data and the new self-evaluation process, to identify learners at risk of withdrawal and initiate earlier interventions.

Attainment

The overall rate of learner attainment for full-time FE and HE programmes is above the sector average. Curriculum teams use digital platforms that support and enhance delivery of programmes in their vocational area. Learners value the support they receive from lecturers to utilise these platforms to extend their learning opportunities. Most faculties have adjusted their curriculum offer to ensure a wider range of provision is available to learners who have work or other commitments. This has led to an increase in part-time provision. Curriculum staff work well with employers to provide flexible delivery options for employees. Learners have access to a very good range of support services. Some are offered on a one-to-one basis, whilst others are delivered to class groups. Learner support advisors provide helpful continuous support to individual learners throughout their college experience. All learners report that teaching staff are very approachable and that they are comfortable about discussing issues relating to learning and teaching with their teachers.

Progression

Learner progression to a positive destination is high. Curriculum teams collaborate well with external stakeholders to reshape and enhance the curriculum, identify current and projected needs of employers, and provide a broader range of progression pathways for learners. Curriculum teams have produced informative pathway maps that support Senior Phase pupils well to make informed choices about their preferred progression route. Learners report that they are supported well to progress through their learning and can give examples from their own experience. All learners value the experience they have had at college to develop and extend their skills.

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

- Across the college, collaboration between curriculum areas and support staff is not sufficiently consistent to ensure effective recruitment practice across all teaching departments.
- Overall rates of learner withdrawal for FE programmes are higher than the sector norm.
- There is significant variation in the level and impact of engagement between curriculum teams and learning development tutors.
- Learner feedback is not used consistently to inform self-evaluation.
- Overall rates of learner attainment in around half of subject areas, across all levels of delivery, are below the sector average.
- The content and quality of self-evaluation documentation is too variable to support effective planning for improvement.
- The approach to analysis and use of data and target setting by staff across faculties is inconsistent and does not support systematic planning for improvement.

The following main points for action were identified:

- Senior managers should ensure consistency in approaches to collaboration between staff in curriculum and support services to improve overall rates of learner retention and attainment.
- Managers should take action to address rates of learner retention and attainment on FE level programmes, and in subject areas, where they are low.
- Managers should support staff to improve the consistency and quality of self-evaluation to inform college-wide action planning for improvement.

What happens next?

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

Barbara Nelson
HM Inspector