

College Progress Visit Report

Dumfries and Galloway College

21 March 2023

College Principal	Joanna Campbell
Progress Visit Date	17-19 January 2023
College Nominee	Douglas Dickson
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Outcome of Progress Visit	The college has made satisfactory progress in a number of areas, however further progress is required in improving outcomes for learners.

1. Background

Progress Visits (PVs) are planned collaboratively between the college, HM Inspectors, and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). During the visit, the team engaged with staff, learners and other stakeholders and focused on progress made since the previous PV. This report outlines the findings from the visit and details of any actions required. It will be shared with the college Principal, college Board of Management and/or Regional Strategic Body and SFC. An accompanying short report will be published on Education Scotland's website.

During the PV, the team explored four overarching themes linked to the college's enhancement plan and priorities around COVID-19 recovery. The themes are learner recruitment; retention; attainment; and progression. All data referred to in this report relates to SFC published performance indicators for academic year 2020/21.

2. The college and its context

Dumfries and Galloway College is a regional college, operating from campuses in Dumfries and Stranraer in the southwest of Scotland. The college delivers education and training across the south of Scotland, offering programmes from Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 2 to 8. The region is predominantly rural, and this can present challenges for learners in relation to transportation, access to broadband, and affordable housing. Deprivation affects around 1 in 5 of the population which is further exacerbated by higher costs of living in the more remote parts of the region. The college is collaborating with regional partners to review the curriculum to better meet the needs of learners and raise aspirations and attainment in line with regional priorities.

The college appointed a new Principal in June 2019, and in June 2020 launched its new strategic plan (Ambition 2025) to support its response to regional and socio-economic priorities over the course of the next 5 years. Since 2019 the college has completed two phases of transformation and is currently progressing a third phase to support future financial sustainability.

3. Summary of findings

3.1 Recruitment

Areas of positive progress

Learner progress and outcomes

- Staff have developed and implemented a range of interventions to improve recruitment arrangements, including maintaining regular contact with successful applicants to the point of enrolment. The number of applicants who enrol on programmes has increased by around a third as a result.

Curriculum, learning, teaching, and assessment

- Curriculum staff have worked productively with staff in secondary schools to review and improve the range of learning opportunities available to young people. As a result, the number of young people accessing senior phase programmes has increased.
- Programme teams have established partnerships with a number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to support skills development in the region. This has positively impacted on the number of young people applying for work-based employability programmes.
- Staff in curriculum teams maintain their knowledge of their vocational areas and make good use of employer forums to update understanding of industry needs. This is helping to inform both the curriculum offer and approaches to recruitment.
- All curriculum teams have adjusted recruitment arrangements and tailored them to better reflect their vocational specialism. This is improving recruitment rates in most curriculum areas.

Services to support learning

- Staff make use of effective referral arrangements with Community Learning and Development (CLD) and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to support unsuccessful applicants to explore options and enter alternative positive destinations.
- Staff make good use of an artificial intelligence (AI) application to support applicants throughout the admissions process. This has been highly effective in maintaining engagement with hard-to-reach applicants and has impacted positively on recruitment rates.
- Staff across support service teams collaborate well with each other and work productively with teaching staff to support learners. Learners express high levels of satisfaction with the quality of support and resources they receive from student services staff.
- A newly introduced 'virtual' induction programme is supporting learners well to navigate college facilities and systems. Learners value being able access to key information in advance of starting their programme.

Learner engagement

- All learners feel well supported throughout the application process which they describe as simple and straightforward. They value the quality of pre-course information in helping them make informed choices about their programme of study, how to access support and engage in learning.
- The Students' Association (SA) contribute well to recruitment and induction activities. Representatives took an active role in college open days and led campus tours for potential learners. This had a positive impact on recruitment.
- The SA worked collaboratively with teaching and support staff to coordinate and deliver useful presentations to all programmes on the role of the SA, and this was successful in raising their profile across campuses.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

- Learner satisfaction with application and enrolment arrangements, based on responses to the early experience survey, is high.

Areas for development

- The college has recently introduced a range of well-considered initiatives to improve recruitment and induction. However, it is too early to measure fully the impact of these initiatives on improving retention and attainment.

3.2 Retention

Areas of positive progress

Learner progress and outcomes

- The Student Satisfaction Experience Survey (SSES) indicates that 90.5% of learners were satisfied with their college experience.
- The college has undertaken useful work with local partners in order to better understand the reasons for learner withdrawal. This is helping to shape future plans in relation to learners who withdraw due to financial pressures or to enter employment.

Curriculum, learning, teaching, and assessment

- Staff in almost all curriculum areas make good use of the college Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to enable learners to access learning resources and recorded lessons. This is helping learners to catch up on classes they may have missed or revisit previous learning.
- Almost all learners benefit from access to a Personal Tutor (PT) and helpful one-to-one meetings at the end of each block to review progress. This is supporting learners well to identify any additional support required and agree actions to improve outcomes.

Services to support learning

- Course teams use the recently introduced Performance Improvement Programme (PIP) arrangements to identify challenges and actions to improve retention and attainment. There are early indications of improvement in the identified programmes, however it is too early to assess fully their impact.
- Each week the staff from the Student Journey team contact learners that have not attended the previous week and coordinate interventions to support them to re-engage with their learning. This is contributing to improved retention.
- The Services to Support Learning team meets weekly to review and analyse retention data and action interventions to support learners at risk of withdrawal. This has increased the number of learners accessing additional support and is contributing to an overall improvement in learner retention.

Learner engagement

- All learners value the support they receive and appreciate being able to access services through a range of options including scanning Quick Response (QR) codes.
- Staff and the SA have introduced a range of helpful initiatives to alleviate the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and support learners experiencing poverty and financial hardship. These include access to hardship funds and a food bank, and free or subsidised canteen facilities.
- In response to learner feedback, microwaves and access to hot water are available to enable learners to prepare their own food and drinks. These facilities are valued and used well by learners.
- Relocation of the SA to the main foyer of the college has improved their accessibility for both staff and learners who can drop-in or make appointments more easily.
- Almost all class representatives and lead class representatives have undergone appropriate training for their role. This has improved the quality of feedback from learners.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

- Staff are increasingly making use college self-evaluation arrangements to focus on actions to improve retention.

Areas for development

- Rates of learner withdrawal for full-time programmes, having improved recently, remain higher than the national average.

- Arrangements for the review of curriculum performance and future curriculum planning are not yet securing improvement in overall rates of learner retention. However, there are early indications of improvement in retention for full-time programmes.
- Although staff are encouraged to share outcomes from Curriculum Enhancement Plans (CEP) and PIP arrangements to support improvement across the college, this is not yet facilitating wider adoption of effective practice by staff across curriculum teams.
- The number of responses from learners to the SESS is low.

3.3 Attainment

Areas of positive progress

Learner progress and outcomes

- Rates of partial success for all modes of delivery are better than the national average.
- Rates of attainment for part-time FE programmes are 1 percentage point above the national average and have improved over the last three years.
- Rates of attainment for part-time HE programmes are 4 percentage points above the national average and have improved over the last three years.

Curriculum, learning, teaching, and assessment

- Staff participation in a helpful mentoring scheme is supporting them well to develop skills and widen understanding of the needs of learners. They discuss and develop approaches to pedagogy and any cross-college issues that may impact on learners.
- As part of the college management transformation programme, improved availability of technology in classrooms and the introduction of arrangements to support staff to evaluate learning and teaching through classroom observation are helping to develop staff practice. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of these developments.
- Teaching staff provide learners with up-to-date information on attendance, unit outcomes and feedback on assessments through access to a helpful dashboard. Learners use the dashboard to plan classwork and monitor their own progress. This is helping learners to manage their time in working towards deadlines.

Services to support learning

- Student advisors and education support workers have recently been assigned to work with individual curriculum teams to identify learners at risk of disengagement and coordinate appropriate interventions. However, it is too early to measure the impact of this work on retention and attainment.
- Staff from the Student Journey team and Performance Improvement team work well together and have developed positive relationships with academic teams. They provide appropriate levels of challenge and support to curriculum teams on learner performance and

outcomes. There are early indications that this is impacting positively on the learning experience.

Learner engagement

- Almost all learners make good use of digital facilities to engage with learning and access resources. They value being able to access recorded lessons to keep on track with their studies or when they have missed classes.
- Almost all learners are prepared well for assessments and knew what is expected of them. They describe the feedback they receive from staff as constructive and helpful in supporting them to progress or revisit aspects of their learning.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

- Senior managers undertook an extensive evaluation of senior phase provision and drew on their findings to develop joint future plans with the local authority. This has supported an improved, shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities in planning and delivering provision for school-age young people.

Areas for development

- Staff value and are engaging well with, the recently implemented self-evaluation arrangements. However, it is too early to measure impact of these arrangements in all programme areas.
- The overall rate of attainment rate for senior phase learners is low.
- The overall attainment rates for full-time FE and HE programmes have remained consistently below the national average over a three-year period.
- Rates of attainment for care-experienced young people are below the national average.

3.4 Progression

Areas of positive progress

Learner progress and outcomes

- The college offers a range of options for learners to progress from FE level programmes to higher levels of study. Partnership arrangements with University of the West of Scotland are providing learners with wider opportunities to progress to degree level study.
- Rates of learner progression to positive destinations are high and have remained steady over the last three years.

Curriculum, learning, teaching, and assessment

- Curriculum staff provide learners with helpful support and information on the range and types of progression opportunities available to them. Some staff draw productively on their engagement with industry contacts to share potential employment opportunities with learners, for example in renewables and engineering.

- The college curriculum provides guaranteed internal progression options. This is motivating and encouraging for learners.
- Almost all curriculum teams have employer forums in place that support learners well to explore employment opportunities.

Services to support learning

- Effective partnerships with a range of agencies including SDS and Bridge to Business, support learners well to take next steps towards employment or further learning.
- SDS careers services staff are available on-campus weekly. Learners benefit this access to careers information, advice, and guidance to explore their progression options.

Learner engagement

- The majority of learners feel well supported in making informed choices, including applications to university or employment. Within curriculum areas, learners benefit from interaction with employers to raise their awareness of career opportunities.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

- Senior managers previously identified a decline in the number of learners applying for degree programmes and introduced a range of actions to address this, including the delivery of helpful UCAS workshops. This was welcomed by learners and the number of applications for university places has increased as a result.

Areas for development

- The college has not yet embedded the development of meta skills consistently across all curriculum areas. This is limiting learners' awareness of these important skills and their ability to identify and promote them to prospective employers.

4. Main points for action

The following main points for action are required:

- College managers and staff teams should continue to evaluate and measure the impact of new quality arrangements on learner recruitment, retention, and attainment.
- College managers should take action to improve rates of learner attainment across all curriculum areas, and for care-experienced learners.

5. 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 ask for a report on progress on these 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 may be required.

Barbara Nelson
HM Inspector