

College Progress Visit Report

Newbattle Abbey College

1 March 2022

College Principal	Roddy Henry
Progress Visit (PV) Date	27 January 2022
College Nominee	Lisa Angus
Lead Inspector	Janet Campbell
College HMI	Margaret Rose Livingstone
Outcome of Progress Visit	Satisfactory progress

Purpose of the progress visit

PVs are planned collaboratively between the college, Education Scotland and Scottish Funding Council (SFC). The team carrying out the PV engages with staff, learners and other stakeholders and produce a summary report for each college, which will be shared with the principal, college Regional Board and/or college Board of Management.

Overall judgement regarding progress

At the end of the PV, HM Inspectors of Education, Associate Assessors and Student Team Members review the evidence gathered during their discussions with college managers, staff, learners and stakeholders. They assess the progress that colleges have made against their Action Plans, taking account of any changes to local circumstances. Based on this evidence, the team will form a view as to whether the college has made satisfactory progress against its Action Plans or has not made satisfactory progress. This outcome is contained within this report with accompanying commentary to support the findings.

The PV for Newbattle Abbey College explored five overarching themes linked to the college's enhancement plan and priorities around COVID-19 recovery. The themes are:

- Outcomes and impact
- Leadership and quality culture
- Curriculum
- Delivery of learning and services to support learning
- Learner engagement

Background and context

The college and its context

As part of the outcome agreement with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Newbattle Abbey College delivers full-time further education (FE) to the equivalent of 921 credits. At the time of the PV there were 51 enrolments on full-time FE programmes, and 14 full-time higher education (HE) enrolments.

The FE curriculum includes SWAP Access programmes in Humanities and Social Science, a National Certificate in Rural Skills and a college-devised Preparation for Further Education programme. The college also delivers full-time HE through the Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Social Science run as an Associate Degree programme in partnership with Queen Margaret University. The college is also the national accreditation centre for the Adult Achievement Awards (AAA) and has worked with key organisations to develop its role as a Forest College, providing creative outdoor learning opportunities with national accreditation for adults and young people. The Forest and Outdoor Learning Awards (FOLAs) have been credit-rated at levels 2-6 and level 8 on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

The college has an annual turnover of circa £2.1m, of which SFC grant funding makes up approximately 58%. The remainder of college funding comes from commercial activity and other income sources.

Newbattle Abbey College has in recent months made new appointments to the Senior Management Team following the retirement of both the Principal and Depute Principal. The new Principal, has been in post since November 2021 and new Depute Principal, since June 2021. The college currently has around 42 members of staff, almost one third of which are members of the Learning and Teaching Team.

Findings from the progress visit

Outcomes and impact

Areas of positive progress

- Retention rates have improved consistently over the last three years until 2019-20, where withdrawal rates were at their lowest level for full-time FE programmes at 9%.
- Retention rates for full-time HE learners also showed an improving trend until 2019-20 with withdrawal rates at a low level of 5%.
- Data provided by the college for 2020-21 shows full-time FE success rates have risen to 71%.
- Success rates for learners on HNC Social Science are high. College data for 2020-21 shows a success rate of 81%.
- Almost all learners benefit significantly in relation to their own personal development through attending programmes delivered at Newbattle Abbey College. They experience improvement in self-esteem and increased levels of self-confidence and self-worth.

Areas for further progress and actions required

- Success rates for full-time FE programmes have been variable over the last three years and fell to 54% in 2019-20.
- Data provided by the college for 2020-21 indicates that rates of full-time FE and HE withdrawal have increased.

Leadership and quality culture

Areas of positive progress

- Since the last PV in November 2019, and throughout the pandemic, effective leadership has ensured that learners remain at the heart of the college and are supported to good effect to make progress on their programmes.
- Significant changes to senior leaderships are now in place. Staff can identify a new momentum and energy and describe feeling more fully engaged than before and having a strong sense of optimism for the future.
- The college is currently developing a new three year Strategic Plan and staff welcome their involvement so far in the discussions, particularly around growth for the future.

- Teaching staff welcome the stability and continuity of operational leadership that the Curriculum Manager role has been able to provide throughout the pandemic period. The development of an effective blended learning approach to timetabling has been particularly welcomed.
- Quality Days have been used well to ensure staff continue to reflect on enhancement activities. Regular learning and teaching team meetings provide a useful platform for staff to consider effective practice and share intelligence in relation to learner progress.
- The college Enhancement Plan for 2021-22 identifies most key areas where improvement is required and allocates responsibility for achievement appropriately, with clear timescales identified. Managers recognise that detailed monitoring of this plan will be essential moving forward.

Areas for further progress and actions required

- The college recognises that there is scope to re-establish a more systematic and consistent approach to reflection and improvement.
- There is a need to ensure staff and learners further develop their digital skills, and that digital infrastructure continues to develop effectively. The Digital Transformation Project, currently underway, will be an important development for the future.
- The number of learners enrolling on college programmes during the pandemic period has declined. The college recognises the need to develop more effective approaches to marketing to support their aspirations for local, national and international growth. Additionally, the college's commercial activity will also benefit from a more focused marketing strategy.

Curriculum

Areas of positive progress

- As part of developing a strategy for the next three years, the college is reviewing the range of programmes on offer, with a view to growing enrolments in existing areas and developing new provision.
- The college offers a range of programmes to meet the needs of those with few or no qualifications, to progress to a positive destination. The curriculum is designed to promote inclusion and access for learners of all abilities and backgrounds.
- The current curriculum offer attracts learners who are not motivated or equipped to attend larger colleges or learners who are seeking the high quality support and nurturing approach the college offers. Many learners have been away from learning for some time and are particularly attracted to the Preparation for FE programmes and the SWAP opportunities on offer.

- Well-established, effective partnership working with Queen Margaret University has resulted in the establishment of the HNC in Social Science as an Associate Degree, although enrolments recently for this programme have fallen.
- The Forest College is now well established and provides an effective feeder pathway into other programmes in the college, particularly Rural Skills. The college recognises that there is further potential to incorporate FOLA developments into the general curriculum discussions in the college and to share practice.

Areas for further progress and actions required

- Progression pathways for some college provision are limited. The college has identified the potential to develop more progression pathways for those learners who require it and enable them to continue their studies beyond one year and prepare for transition to Level 6 programmes.
- Partnership working with SDS to support preparation for employment across the curriculum and work placement opportunities for learners is underdeveloped. The college recognises that progress in this area has been impacted by the pandemic.

Delivery of learning and services to support learning

Areas of positive progress

- The pandemic and associated periods of college closure and restrictions meant that emergency measures were needed in March 2020 to ensure that remote delivery was effective, within the constraints of the limited digital infrastructure that the college had. Teaching staff worked hard to achieve this.
- Good use was made by staff of the digital platform Zoom for delivery of teaching sessions and this enabled staff and learners to develop their online learning skills.
- Staff have reflected on and learned from initial periods of remote learning. The college is now focused on developing further MS Teams as their virtual learning platform for the future. They have secured the services and expertise of College Development Network to deliver Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) for teaching staff as part of their Digital Transformation Project.
- Since summer 2021, a blended learning model of delivery has been developed which ensures continuity for learners should further restrictions be required as a result of public health guidance. Learners value the flexibility of a blended approach and value highly their face-to-face sessions in the college.
- Staff have ensured that services to support learning have been transferred effectively to remote delivery with dedicated support available online, complimented well by digital resources to support mental health and overall wellbeing.
- Support for Learning staff deliver one-to-one sessions to all learners during college induction sessions and these are used to good effect to identify learners' individual support needs.

- All class groups have an allocated guidance tutor who facilitates weekly discussions with learners. These sessions are used well and ensure that learners have an initial point of contact for any problems and benefit from timely solutions.

Areas for further progress and actions required

- Currently staff do not benefit from sufficient opportunity to share effective practice and expertise in relation to digital delivery.

Learner engagement

Areas of positive progress

- The Student Representative Council (SRC) has remained active in the college throughout the pandemic period. They have adapted their approaches and developed digital arrangements to aid communication with learners.
- Class representatives are in place and their role is well understood by learners. Learners are also confident that they can approach their teachers or guidance staff when they have concerns and are responded to quickly. There are a number of examples of changes being made as a result of learner feedback.
- All class representatives have recently completed initial sparqs training, with plans in place for further training.
- The SRC is well represented on the college Board and relevant committees, where learners feel their voice is listened to. Regular SRC meetings with college senior managers have also enhanced communication with learners, and are helping to identify issues at an early stage.
- Digital communication groups (using WhatsApp) have been established for some classes and they are effective in allowing the sharing of ideas and information in a timely way. The use of these groups also allow learners to remain connected to each other.
- As a result of partnership working between SRC and college management, a quiet space has been developed on campus for learners. This initiative is generally welcomed by learners and will be very useful as more learners return to campus.

Areas for further progress and actions required

- Gaining learner feedback and monitoring learner satisfaction levels with their college experience has largely been anecdotal in the recent past. The college is aware that a return to more consistent, systematic surveys and focus groups will be important in planning for improvement.

What happens next?

The progress visit report will be shared with SFC, the college Board (and in multi-college regions, the Regional Strategic Body).

Janet P Campbell
HM Inspector