

Annual Engagement Visit Report

Newbattle Abbey College

13 August 2024

College Principal	Roddy Henry
Annual Engagement Visit Date	11 June 2024
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1. Background

Annual Engagement Visits (AEVs) are planned collaboratively between the college, HM Inspectors, and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). During the AEV, the team focussed on the progress made on improvement priorities and the outcomes of previous engagement with HM Inspectors. HM Inspectors met with staff, learners, and other stakeholders. This report outlines the findings from the visit, and includes aspects of positive practice, aspects for improvement, and any associated main points for action. The report will be shared with the college Principal, college Board of Management, and/or Regional Strategic Body. An accompanying short report will be published on Education Scotland's website.

During the AEV the team explored the following overarching themes: learner progress and outcomes, approaches to assuring and enhancing the quality of learning and teaching including professional updating, and learner engagement.

The team also reviewed progress against actions identified during our engagement in academic year (AY) 2022-23.

2. The college and its context

Newbattle Abbey College operates under a governing deed of trust and offers residential accommodation for learners from across Scotland, receiving around half of its funds from the SFC. It provides a range of programmes from levels 4 to 8 on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) which include programmes centred on therapeutic and outdoor learning.

The college enrolls approximately eighty learners each year on programmes for adults and young people in need of the support that the unique environment the college offers. A high proportion of these learners have diverse additional learning needs, are care experienced or declare a disability.

3. Summary of findings

3.1 Learner progress and outcomes

Summary of key performance indicator information

- In AY 2021-2022, the overall success rate for part-time further education (FE) learners was fourteen percentage points above national sector performance. The overall success rate for full-time FE learners was 3.8 percentage points above national sector performance. However, for full-time higher education (HE) learners, the overall success rate was one percentage point below national sector performance.
- Published data for AY 2022-2023 indicates that the success rates for learners on full-time programmes have increased. Overall success rates for learners on full-time FE programmes improved by 14.6% and for full-time HE programmes by 10.7%.
- In AY 2021-2022, the learner withdrawal rates for most modes of attendance were lower than national performance levels. Published data for AY 2022-2023 indicates the learner withdrawal rate for full-time FE and HE programmes has improved.
- In AY 2022-2023 the success rate for learners enrolled on land-based industries programmes was 87.5% which is 12.7 percentage points above national sector performance.
- In AY 2022-2023 the success rates for care experienced learners, learners with a declared disability and learners from the most deprived areas were well above national sector performance.

Evaluative commentary

Equity, attainment, and achievement for all learners (QI 3.2)

Areas of positive progress

- The college collaborates well with Women's Aid East and Midlothian to deliver training for staff on trauma informed practice and domestic abuse. This helps staff to improve teaching practice and pastoral support for learners who have experienced trauma.
- The college culture and ethos have a strong focus on learner wellbeing. Staff tailor support arrangements to the needs of individual learners to provide them with the best opportunities for success.
- Learners engage well with supported study sessions and subject-specific learning support to develop their essential skills. This additional focus on academic support enhances the overall learning experience and contributes to successful learner outcomes.
- Staff refer learners who withdraw from their programme promptly to Skills Development Scotland to access specialist support with their next steps and help them achieve a positive destination.

- The college provides a supportive environment for less confident and vulnerable learners. The outdoor learning spaces and therapeutic teaching approaches support learners well with meta skills such as confidence building and resilience.
- Staff enhance the learner experience to help them remain on their programme. For example, all learners and staff are offered a free lunch. The college has also created a forest area for female learners to engage in quiet reflection and improve their wellbeing.
- Teaching staff have a good focus on skills for learning, life and work which helps learners to recognise their development and achievement of meta skills. In the rural skills programme this approach supports high levels of engagement and achievement.

Areas for development

- None identified.

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

Leadership for improvement of learning and teaching (QI 1.2)

Areas of positive progress

- Senior leaders conducted a comprehensive review of the curriculum offer to ensure that college programmes are relevant and sustainable. They consulted external partners and stakeholders to analyse the needs of current and future learners, and establish progression pathways. This review highlighted a gap in provision between levels 4 and 6 on the SCQF. College managers are now developing a new level 5 programme to improve progression opportunities for learners.
- Curriculum teams use performance data and feedback from learners effectively to identify areas of learning and teaching practice that need improvement. This provides learners with a more personalised and flexible learning experience.
- Curriculum managers have aligned the core curriculum offer well with community, partnership and project work. This provides learning opportunities for individuals with specific interests and needs who are keen to engage in college programmes. These learners are supported well to progress on to mainstream programmes.
- The college has credit-rating status and uses this to benefit learners by developing specialist programmes such as the Forest and Outdoor Learning Awards (FOLAs) and Adult Achievement Awards (AAAs). FOLAs prioritise holistic education, hands-on learning and nature immersion. They have achieved considerable success in supporting the unique needs of learners at risk of low attainment.
- Professional development for learning and teaching is an integral part of teaching roles. Most staff continue to be involved with their area of expertise outside of college and use this experience well to maintain up-to-date subject knowledge.
- Teaching staff share effective learning and teaching practice through informal meetings and professional learning opportunities. Teaching staff also meet with their peers from the

University of Wisconsin during the annual residential programme to discuss professional practice and share teaching approaches.

Areas for development

- There is scope to enhance professional practice by using the professional standards and the evaluation of naturally occurring professional development activities.

Learning, teaching, and assessment (QI 2.3)

Areas of positive progress

- Most curriculum staff use contextualised and project-based learning and teaching approaches effectively to reduce the assessment burden for learners.
- Teaching staff participate well in the buddy system and team teaching opportunities to reflect on and enhance their teaching practice. Most teaching staff have a teaching qualification.
- Learners praise the enthusiasm that teaching staff have for their subject specialism. Teaching staff make good use of engaging and interactive approaches to learning and teaching. These include anecdotes and personal experience, effective questioning techniques, collaborative projects and peer learning.
- Teaching staff engage proactively in professional updating opportunities. They use a personal log and a Microsoft Teams site to record their professional development and to reflect on improvements to learning, teaching and assessment approaches.
- A digital technologist is available for staff and learners to support them with their digital skills. For learners, this is helping them to meet the challenges of gaps in their learning. For teaching staff, it is an opportunity to improve their digital skills and increase the use of technology in their lessons.
- Curriculum teams use feedback from mid-course and end-of-year reviews effectively to enhance the learner experience. The close community setting of the college provides many opportunities for informal feedback from learners, and staff act quickly on this information to improve the learning environment.

Areas for development

- Some learners experience challenges with the digital technologies staff use to support learning and teaching. These issues include reliability and compatibility of technology and the level of digital skills of some staff.

3.3 Learner Engagement

Learners leading learning (QI 1.2)

Areas of positive progress

- Learners have good opportunities to influence the delivery and content of programmes. For example, some learners on the Adult Achievement Award co-created and deliver modules alongside teaching staff.
- Almost all learners report a positive and welcoming environment for learning and excellent relationships with college staff. They value the way that teaching staff adapt learning and approaches to accommodate their individual needs and preferences.
- Most learners describe well the positive impact the college has on their confidence, sense of self-worth, motivation and aspirations. Many learners have a background of poor mental or physical health, and barriers to learning. They appreciate how the college has supported their journey from community and access programmes through non-advanced and advanced level courses.
- The Student Council is represented well on college committees and the office bearers feel their views are valued by managers and staff. Fifteen learners are members of the Student Council, which is a high proportion of college enrolments.
- Learners attend curriculum team meetings to provide feedback on their experience. They engage well with student partnerships in quality Scotland and the National Union of Students. This engagement supports them to articulate their views effectively at curriculum team meetings and college committees.
- The recent curriculum review considered the views of a wide range of external partners, including universities, Midlothian Council, and third sector agencies. Managers use these opinions effectively to shape the content of programmes and influence strategies for the development of learning and teaching.

Areas for development

- None identified.

Evaluation leading to improvement (QI 1.4)

Areas of positive progress

- College managers use a systematic approach to collate evidence from self-evaluation into action plans. Managers and curriculum teams meet regularly to discuss these plans to enhance the quality of learning and teaching, micro-teaching and improvements to pedagogy.
- Managers distribute questionnaires to learners for feedback on individual teaching staff. This is a highly effective approach to gather the views of learners about their learning experience and is used effectively by managers to improve learning, teaching, and assessment approaches.

- Most learners complete the Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey each year and are highly satisfied with their college experience. The overall satisfaction rating for FE learners is 97% and for HE learners is 90%.
- Managers meet with curriculum teams regularly to reflect on the college enhancement plan. Suggestions for improvement to the learner experience are passed to the Curriculum and Student Experience Committee for consideration and implementation of agreed actions.
- Curriculum teams use learner feedback well to inform changes to programme design and their approaches to learning and teaching. These include interventions and support arrangements to help retain learners and support achievement.

Areas for development

- There is scope to strengthen the monitoring and reporting of actions taken as a result of learner feedback.

Learning teaching and assessment (QI 2.3)

Areas of positive progress

- Learners report they have good opportunities to provide feedback to the college and that this influences approaches to learning, teaching and assessment.
- A few teaching staff are experimenting with Microsoft Teams and Class Notebook as a collaborative space. These platforms are shared with learners and provide a communal area for lesson notes, presentations and assessment feedback. Learners and teaching staff also use this space to track learner progress using the online notebook.
- Curriculum staff in rural skills work effectively to build a strong sense of community among learners, promoting a shared ownership of standards. Each day begins with a group guidance session and time is available for one-to-one guidance. This approach supports learners to focus on learning and skills development. These learners have high levels of attainment and good progression to other programmes or employment.
- Lesson delivery is flexible to meet the specific needs and challenges of individual learners. For example the mathematics unit has been extended into semester two for learners on the Scottish Wider Access Programme and focussed study support sessions are used to ensure learners are ready for assessment.

Areas for development

- The use of Class Notebook is not yet used consistently across all curriculum teams.

3.4 Update on previous Education Scotland evaluative activities AY 2022-23

Areas of positive progress

The college has made good progress since the last AEV. Managers have increased the opportunities for staff to build their digital skills and share best practice. A few teaching staff have started to introduce new technology to support learning, teaching, and assessment. Professional development is logged by individual staff and used to reflect on learning and teaching approaches. Managers have carried out a comprehensive curriculum portfolio review and are using this as a basis for improving programme content and teaching approaches. However, further progress is still required with the use of digital technologies by teaching staff and the tracking of learner feedback in self-evaluation to support planning for improvement. There are no outstanding actions for safeguarding.

4. Main Points for Action

- None identified.

5. 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.

Ian Beach
HM Inspector

Annexe 1 Evaluative Terms

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.

Annexe 2

Full-time FE

College			
	Withdrawal	Partial Success	Completed successfully
2018-19	13.9%	11.1%	75%
2019-20	8.6%	37.0%	54.3%
2020-21	18.9%	15.1%	66.0%
2021-22	34.9%	2.3%	62.8%
	22.6%	0%	77.4%
National sector performance			
	Withdrawal	Partial Success	Completed successfully
2018-19	24.70%	10.10%	65.20%
2019-20	20.80%	13.20%	66.00%
2020-21	27.30%	11.70%	60.90%
2021-22	29.30%	11.70%	59.00%

Part-time FE

College			
	Withdrawal	Partial Success	Completed successfully
2018-19			
2019-20			
2020-21	0%	20.0%	80.0%
2021-22	3.7%	6.1%	90.2%
	58.3%	8.3%	33.3%
National sector performance			
	Withdrawal	Partial Success	Completed successfully
2018-19	9.30%	11.00%	79.70%
2019-20	9.50%	12.50%	78.00%
2020-21	10.10%	13.70%	76.20%
2021-22	10.70%	13.00%	76.30%

Full-time HE

College			
	Withdrawal	Partial Success	Completed successfully
2018-19	14.8%	18.5%	66.7%
2019-20	5.3%	21.1%	73.7%
2020-21	19.2%	0%	80.8%
2021-22	30.8%	7.7%	61.5%
	11.1%	16.7%	72.2%
National sector performance			
	Withdrawal	Partial Success	Completed successfully
2018-19	18.50%	11.70%	69.80%
2019-20	14.90%	11.70%	73.40%
2020-21	17.60%	10.90%	71.60%
2021-22	23.60%	13.90%	62.50%