Annual Engagement Visit Report

Newbattle Abbey College

1 August 2023

College Principal	**Roddy Henry**
Annual Engagement Visit Date	**23rd May 2023**
College Nominee	**Kirsty Adamson**
College HMI	**Ian Beach**

1.   Background

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 linked to the college's enhancement plan and priorities around COVID-19 recovery: learner recruitment; retention; attainment; and progression.

2.   The college and its context

Newbattle Abbey College operates under a Governing Deed of Trust and receives approximately half of its funding from the SFC. The balance of income is generated from a portfolio of other funding sources and commercial activities.

The college provides a range of full-time programmes from level 4 to 7 on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Approximately 90 full-time learners enrol at Newbattle Abbey College each year including a relatively high proportion of care-experienced learners or learners with a disability. The college promotes adult learning and delivers several Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) programmes in partnership with universities.

The college has recently appointed a new Chair of the Board of Directors, a Depute Principal, and Director of Academic Development, and a Director of Operations and Business Development.

3. Summary of findings

3.1 Recruitment

Areas of positive progress

Learner Progress and Outcomes

- College managers have extended their engagement with potential applicants by making better use of social media. This has raised the college profile and improved learners' awareness of progression routes into college programmes.

- The college website has been refreshed to include learner case studies which aim to motivate and inspire applicants. This helpful information about college programmes, and the application process, is helping to inform new learners and encourage applications.

Curriculum, Learning and teaching and assessment

- Curriculum staff meet with applicants during information sessions where they discuss programme choice options which take account of individual needs and interests. Staff take good account of prior learning, aspirations, and individual circumstances, to help learners make informed choices about their college programme.

- Many learners attend useful introductory sessions prior to their formal induction activities. This helps learners develop skills for individual and group-based learning before starting their programme.

Services to support learning

- Support service staff identify learner support needs effectively by screening all learners at the point of enrolment. They contact identified learners, prior to the start of their programme, and discuss support choice options to meet individual need. This gives confidence to applicants that their support needs will be met when they begin their programme.

- Support service staff prioritise financial and funding application advice for all learners. This helps reassure them about their level of financial support, which is particularly important when planning to study away from home.

Learner engagement

- Almost all learners are satisfied with the information they receive during the recruitment process about their chosen programme and progression pathways.

- Student Ambassadors promote the benefits of college life well to potential applicants through use of social media and video clips. This is part of the college's revised marketing strategy and increases learner awareness of study options at college.

- Learner representatives take an active role in college open days and lead campus tours for potential learners. This has a positive impact on recruitment onto college programmes.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

- Staff use learner feedback effectively to plan improvements to the application, enrolment, and induction processes. For example, the content of college open days, induction activities and marketing approaches, have all been improved recently.

- College managers have revised the application process and have introduced a new Management Information Service (MIS), with all applications now being online. This has resulted in faster response times, and more timely offers to all applicants.

Areas for development

- None identified.

3.2   Retention

Areas of positive progress

Learner Progress and Outcomes

- Overall, rates of learner withdrawal for all modes of study are better than national performance levels.

- Results from the SFC Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey 2021-22 indicate that a high proportion of learners are satisfied with their college programme. For full-time FE and HE programmes, satisfaction rates are around five percentage points higher than those reported nationally.

Curriculum, Learning and teaching and assessment

- Curriculum staff offer flexible timetabling and a family-friendly approach to planning learning activities to help learners who are balancing work and caring responsibilities. This is supporting learners to remain on their programme and accommodate their other commitments.

- Almost all learners benefit from a wide range of project-based learning activities. For example, the Forest Outdoor Learning Awards and interacting with visiting learners on the Experience Scotland Programme. These activities promote cultural diversity and enhance the learner experience.

Services to support learning

- All learners benefit from face-to-face and online counselling sessions. This helps build their resilience and confidence levels and is having a positive impact on reducing withdrawal rates.

- Support staff work well with curriculum teams to manage the increase in demand for mental health support. Wellbeing, self-care, and resilience workshops are timetabled weekly to support learners with stress reduction and mental health concerns.

- All learners have access to staff trained in Mental Health First Aid. These services support learners to continue with their studies and build their confidence and resilience.

Learner engagement

- The Student Council and class representatives have positive working relationships with curriculum staff. Most learners value the level of support they receive from teaching and support staff to help them make progress with their studies.

- The Student Council meet informally every two weeks to gather learner feedback on current issues such as the cost-of-living crisis and funding. Managers use this feedback well to improve college processes that support retention.

- Almost all learners report that they are seen, valued, and heard by college staff.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

- College staff use learner feedback well to explore and understand the reasons for learner withdrawal from programmes. They develop interventions and support approaches to help learners remain at college. Examples include the wider use of assistive technologies and referrals made to counselling staff.

- Curriculum teams reflect well on learner feedback and introduce improvements to programme design, such as integrated assessments across subject areas and standardised use of plagiarism detection software and project-based learning. These improvements are engaging more learners in their studies and helping to reduce withdrawal rates.

Areas for development

- The approach to monitoring and recording of learner feedback does not systematically support college wide self-evaluation and action-planning for improvement.

3.3 Attainment

Areas of positive progress

Learner Progress and Outcomes

- Overall, rates of learner success for all modes of study are better than national performance levels.

- Around half of learners enrolling at the college have a disability. The success rate for these learners is four percentage points above national performance level.

- The success rate for learners from an ethnic minority background is well above national performance levels.

Curriculum, Learning and teaching and assessment

- Most curriculum staff use blended learning and contextualised assessment opportunities well to reduce the assessment burden for learners and improve attainment rates.

- Staff across the college collaborate with a range of external partners to support learners throughout their time at college. For example, graduate guest speakers and potential

employers are invited to raise learners' aspirations and signpost skills development. This approach is valued and helps motivate individuals to succeed on their college programme.

- All curriculum staff attend external events and guest speaker sessions as part of their professional learning and the college-wide approach to learning and professional development.

- Teaching staff reflect well on their delivery approaches using class feedback to inform their professional development needs and improve their pedagogy. They share their practice with other colleges. Themes covered include support for learners with additional learning needs such as autism and dyslexia.

Services to support learning

- Support service staff use assistive technologies well to identify and provide support for learners who disclose an additional support need. This helps these learners to overcome any barriers to completing their programme successfully.

Learner engagement

- Care experienced learners receive helpful support from peer mentors, social workers, and course tutors. This holistic approach has increased engagement levels of these learners in college activities and improved their attainment rates.

- Staff use digital technologies effectively to support learners to achieve. Most classes are recorded for learners to access when required, and social media film clips and images are used effectively as learning and teaching resources.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

- Curriculum managers use learner feedback well to improve programme delivery and content.

- Managers have recently renewed the college strategic plan and quality assurance processes. This is supporting curriculum staff with the planning of improvements and strategies to increase attainment across all college programmes.

Areas for development

- Most curriculum staff do not have sufficient opportunity to build their digital skills confidence and expertise and share best practice in digital delivery.

- There is no systematic approach to recording and evaluating the engagement in and impact of, professional development of staff across the college.

3.4   Progression

Areas of positive progress

Learner Progress and Outcomes

- Learner progression to a positive destination is high, with 89% of learners entering a positive destination after leaving college.

- The college has established successful partnership arrangements with local colleges and universities. These provide a good range of opportunities for learners to progress to higher level programmes and degree study.

Curriculum, Learning and teaching and assessment.

- College staff use labour market intelligence well to plan learner progression pathways into employment and other positive destinations.

Services to support learning

- Support service staff provide a high level of support to learners who are applying for college or university courses. This includes assistance with CV writing, job applications and mock interviews.

- Support service staff take good account of learner feedback to adapt assistive technology tools. This helps learners with additional needs to apply and transition into further study and university programmes.

Learner engagement

- Almost all learners report that they receive helpful information regarding industry links and progression into further study. They are encouraged to attend university open days and employer events, to raise awareness of the progression routes available to them.

- Former Newbattle Abbey College graduates are invited to speak at the college's annual awards ceremony to celebrate learner success and help raise aspirations for learners to achieve and progress.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

- Curriculum and support staff make good use of feedback received from employers and industry links to inform and influence curriculum design changes that support learner progression.

- Staff in history and English have worked with visiting University of Wisconsin learners on the Experience Scotland programme. This collaboration increased student self-confidence and builds aspirations.

- Feedback from universities about the performance of learners that have progressed from the SWAP programmes to degree level study indicates that these learners are achieving well.

Areas for development

- None identified.

4.   Main Points for Action

The following main points for action are required:

- 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