

Newbattle Abbey College

15 January 2016

**A report by HM Inspectors
on behalf of the
Scottish Funding Council**

Full report



Scottish Funding Council
Promoting further and higher education

The external review process

HM Inspectors undertake an independent review of the quality of provision in Scotland's colleges on behalf of the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFC) under a service level agreement between the council and Education Scotland. External review teams include HM Inspectors, associate assessors and a student team member.

During external reviews, members of the review teams observe learning and teaching and hold discussions with learners, staff and stakeholders. They consider information on learner attainment and evaluate learner progress and outcomes. They meet with members of the Board of Management and obtain feedback from community groups, partners and employers who work with the college.

The purpose of this report is to convey the main outcomes arising from the external review, to acknowledge the college's strengths and to provide a clear agenda for future action to improve and enhance quality.

This external review results in judgements of **effective** or **limited effectiveness** or **not effective** that express the external review team's overall evaluation of *high quality learning, learner engagement and quality culture*.

The report also uses the following terms to describe numbers and proportions:	
almost all	over 90%
most	75-90%
majority	50-74%
less than half	15-49%
few	up to 15%

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1. Introduction

The external review

The external review by Education Scotland took place during the week beginning 9 November 2015.

We examined learning and teaching and other important activities that impact on the quality of the learner experience. We evaluated these against the three key principles of *high quality learning*, *learner engagement* and *quality culture*, using the 13 reference quality indicators outlined in *External quality arrangements for Scotland's colleges, updated August 2013*. We also included QIs 1.3 and 2.2 to support our evaluations. We used information from previous visits to the college to decide the scope of the review.

We found an example of excellence which we describe in this report on page 17.

The external review team talked with learners, staff at all levels in the college, members of the Board of Management, employers, external agencies and other users of the college.

2. The college and its context

In carrying out the external review of Newbattle Abbey College, Education Scotland took the following college context fully into account.

Newbattle Abbey College is a small national specialist college which offers residential and day programmes for adults. The college operates within a 125 acre heritage estate under a Governing Deed of Trust, set up in 1937 by Philip Kerr, 11th Marquis of Lothian. College Trustees include the Principals and Vice Chancellors of the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow. The Trustees have responsibility for maintaining the ownership of Newbattle Abbey College. The college employs a small team of 38 staff to carry out teaching and support roles.

Newbattle Abbey College contributes to national outcomes through its involvement with a range of strategic partnerships. These include the National Strategic Forum for Adult Learning and the National Gaelic Education Strategy Group. At a regional level the college works with Midlothian Community Planning Partnership (CPP) and is an active member of several groups linked to Midlothian's CPP. These include Improving Opportunities for People in Midlothian, Midlothian Employment Action Network, Midlothian Adult Learning Partnership (MALP) and Developing Midlothian's Young Workforce.

The college has a small portfolio of specialised programmes aimed at supporting adult learners to return to learning. It focuses particularly on providing progression opportunities for adults who have previously experienced limited success in education and, or encountered challenges which have affected their learning. The college has initiated a successful programme of expansion and diversification of its curriculum to meet the needs of local learners. Three new full-time programmes have been introduced in the past year in: Rural Skills; Social Sciences; and Celtic Studies. In January 2015, the college became the national awarding body for Adult Achievement Awards Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Levels 3, 4 and 6. The college is running a cross-sectoral pilot programme to deliver Adult Achievement Awards across Scotland during 2015-16.

In 2014-15, the college delivered 1,509 wSUMs and had 87 full-time learners. The college annual turnover is £1.6m. The SFC provides 42% of this income through recurrent grant support for the development and delivery of the curriculum. The college supplements its income through commercial activities to support the upkeep and maintenance of its historical building and estate.

3. Outcomes of External Review

Judgement of *Effectiveness*

Section A: Overarching judgement

Newbattle Abbey College has in place **effective** arrangements to maintain and enhance the quality of its provision and outcomes for learners and other stakeholders.

This judgement means that, in relation to quality assurance and enhancement, the college is led well, has sufficiently robust arrangements to address any identified minor weaknesses, and is likely to continue to improve the quality of its services for learners and other stakeholders.

Section B: Supporting statements

Learner progress and outcomes

Almost all learners are enjoying their college experience and making good progress in their learning. They are succeeding well in their programmes and developing skills for further learning and employment. Successful completion rates in full-time further education (FE) programmes and full-time higher education (HE) programmes are significantly higher than the national sector performance levels, although withdrawals are a concern in some subject areas. College programmes meet the needs of learners well, and appropriate support is provided for learners who may have more challenging learning needs. Almost all learners progress on to their next intended stage of learning. The college are fully aware of, and are responding well to, their developing responsibilities in terms of equalities, safeguarding, and Corporate Parenting. Learners engage enthusiastically in a range of charitable and cultural activities which support them well in developing their confidence and core skills. The college offers an appropriate range of well-planned programmes that support learner progression effectively.

Learning and teaching processes

Learners actively engage in their own learning and participate enthusiastically during lessons. Equality and diversity awareness is promoted successfully through wider college and classroom-based activities. Learners use a range of resources well and develop independent learning skills which supports progression onto further learning. Relationships between staff and learners are very positive and are built on mutual respect. Learners are progressing well and are encouraged and supported to produce work of a high standard. However, some opportunities to include learners in the early planning of their own learning are missed.

Programme teams plan assessment schedules well and formative assessment is used effectively to prepare learners for assessment and reinforce learning. The

college has a well-established culture of effective learner support that works well for all learners. Additional assessment arrangements are implemented quickly and are effective in reducing barriers to achievement. There is a robust and systematic process of programme review which all staff participate in and appropriate actions are implemented promptly.

Learner engagement

All learners are actively encouraged to influence their learning through provision of feedback to teaching staff. Staff take this feedback into consideration and often make relevant changes to programme delivery or content and share these decisions with learners. In all classes, learners know their class representatives and their constructive role in collating learners' views. Class representatives are confident and they represent well the views of their peers which often result in practical improvements. Learners contribute to the creation of a *Personal Learning Support Plan* (PLSP) which help develop their learning and support progress and attainment discussions.

The Student Representative Council (SRC) engage in various college committees including the Board of Directors. SRC members participate actively in these committees and there are many examples of college decisions which have been influenced by SRC input. The SRC encourage learners and staff to engage with both national and community-based extra-curricular activities and events. Through the interests of learners, the *Green Team* has been established to develop actions on sustainability. This group has agreed aims and actions which will broaden learners' sustainability experiences and make contributions to the wider community.

Leadership and Quality Culture

The college is successfully maintaining its role as Scotland's national adult education residential college while increasingly meeting the needs of its local communities. Strategic partnership working is a major strength of the college. Strategic planning is well informed by policy and economic developments, and is clearly aligned to the aims of its different stakeholders. Recent curriculum developments reflect considered, creative planning by senior college staff and form part of the college's positive response to regionalisation and to Developing the Young Workforce. The principal and the senior management team provide highly effective leadership. College staff are fully committed to delivering the college's strategic aims. However, the high proportion of part-time staff can sometimes make communication challenging and not all staff are able to contribute fully to planning and development. The recent introduction of new programmes has also energised learning and teaching staff, with staff working together positively to explore new approaches. Strategies for reducing withdrawal and improving attainment are appropriate and in place across all programmes. Leadership for support services is strong. Support managers and staff make a clear and positive contribution to shaping the whole college experience and planning the college's future development. The college has a strong focus on quality and a good track record for achievement and progression of learners. A range of effective actions has led to improvement in the current year.

Section C: Areas of positive practice

- The successful completion rate in full-time FE programmes is 77%, eleven percentage points above the national sector performance level. This is underpinned by an improving trend over a three-year period.
- The development and design of new programmes is based on sound analysis of progression pathways, and has supported very good progression.
- Learners make good use of resources made available to them which encourages greater levels of independent learning. Improved information and communications technology (ICT) facilities in the current year is supporting independent learning well.
- Identification of support needs is managed well by support staff and effective arrangements implemented quickly to reduce barriers to learning.
- The practice of setting tasks for learners to complete in their own time and asking them to bring work to tutorials is effective and is preparing learners well for HE level study.
- Staff reflect on performance indicators, learner feedback and curriculum issues and quickly arrange appropriate improvement actions.
- The SRC members represent learners on a range of important college groups. They are regular attenders and contribute well to discussion and decision making.
- Effective liaison with key local and national partners ensures that the college's growing curriculum has relevant entry points and progression pathways.
- Partners have a very high regard for the college for its clear commitment to learning as a transformational tool, for its leadership in realising initiatives and for the quality of what it delivers.

Section D: Areas for development

- Over the last three years, early withdrawal rates in full-time FE programmes are slightly worse than the national sector performance rates.
- Although most programmes have a clear intention of enabling learners to progress to further learning, employability skills are not promoted sufficiently within these programmes.
- Teaching staff do not always take opportunities to involve learners fully in planning their own learning during the early stages of their programme.

Section E: Main point for action

- **The college management and staff should continue to improve withdrawal and attainment rates where these are low.**

4. How well are learners progressing and achieving relevant, high quality outcomes?

How effective is the college at achieving and maintaining high levels of retention, attainment and progression?

The college offers a small range of provision which consists primarily of five full-time, FE level programmes. Total enrolments for the year are less than 100 learners, therefore care is required when interpreting percentages and trend data against national performance levels.

Over the last three years, early withdrawal rates in full-time FE programmes are slightly worse than the national sector performance level. However, due to the small scale of provision, this represents one or two learners. Full-time FE further withdrawal rates have improved over the last three years, and are five percentage points lower than the 2013-14 national sector performance level. Successful completion rates for full-time FE provision is 77%, eleven percentage points above the national sector performance level. There is an improving trend over the last three years.

The full-time FE Access to Arts and Humanities programme (SCQF level 6) aims to prepare and enable learners to progress to further study. The successful completion rate for this programme is low at 61%. However, of the number of learners who completed their programme successfully, 81% progressed to university; 7% onto a college programme and 8% entered employment. Overall, this progression rate is positive and in line with the aims of the programme.

The college has recently introduced a Higher National Certificate (HNC) Social Sciences programme (SCQF level 7) delivered in partnership with Queen Margaret University. This is the college's only HE level provision. The programme has a high early withdrawal rate of 18%. However, there were no further withdrawals and no learners completed with partial success. The programme has a successful completion rate of 82% which is eleven percentage points above the national sector performance level. Fourteen learners completed the programme successfully and 12 progressed to study at a university.

How well does the College adhere to its statutory principles?

The college has appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures which are being updated to take account of the *Prevent* counter-terrorism initiative. This work is being led by a small team of staff who have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The team is collaborating with external partners and consulting with learners to inform arrangements. The Board, senior managers and all staff are appropriately informed and trained in relation to safeguarding responsibilities and have been consulted about updated requirements.

College managers and staff are fully aware of the college's Corporate Parenting responsibilities and appropriate mechanisms are in place to identify care leavers. There are clear and appropriate arrangements in place for providing additional support, liaising with other agencies and monitoring care leavers' progress.

All staff recognise their role in promoting an understanding of equality and diversity. The college coordinates events throughout the academic year to promote equality and diversity. Staff development and awareness raising activities have been successful in increasing the profile of a wide range of diversity matters with learners and staff. Learners often lead activities to share information about different traditions and cultures. College managers and staff have audited curriculum content across all programmes to ensure appropriate opportunities are identified and to explore equality and diversity-related themes. These arrangements are helping to inform the college calendar of cultural events and the planning of continuing professional development for staff.

How well do programmes and services meet learners needs?

The range of college programmes takes good account of learner needs and aspirations. Programmes reflect well the principles and themes of Curriculum for Excellence and offer clear progression routes to further and higher education. This includes, for example, an Associate Student degree programme with Queen Margaret University for learners undertaking an HNC in Social Sciences.

The development and design of new programmes is based on sound analysis of appropriate progression pathways. Young learners and adult returners with low levels of qualifications are able to access a Preparation for FE programme in January. The programme provides useful support and preparation for entry to an SCQF level 5/6 programme within the college or at another institution.

The Rural Skills programme, delivered in conjunction with Midlothian Council, takes good account of the individual needs of learners and prepares them well for progression on to employment. Learners undertaking HNC and Access to Arts and Humanities Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) are prepared well for progression to university. However, although most programmes have a clear intention of enabling learners to progress to further learning, employability skills are not promoted sufficiently.

Teaching staff make good use of tutorial-style delivery approaches to promote independent learning and support transition to self-directed study. Learners are very satisfied with their programmes and their college experience.

How well do learners make progress, attain qualifications and achieve more widely?

Learners make good progress in their learning and develop useful strategies and approaches to prepare for further learning. They gain a range of wider skills through participating in activities which develop citizenship skills and encourage achievement. Visits to places of political and cultural interest and participation in charitable work, volunteering, and enterprise activities, help learners to build confidence and develop employability skills.

Learners on programmes which are designed to lead to further learning draw productively on wider activities to prepare for progression. These include, engagement with university departments and carrying out projects and tasks which develop skills for independent learning. Almost all learners progress successfully to their intended next stage in learning or employment. However, there are low successful completion rates

on the SWAP programme. Learners enjoy their college programme and some describe the experience as 'life changing'. These learners benefit from a variety of learning and teaching approaches and well-targeted individual support. Attainment levels in SQA core skills units are high and compare well with national sector performance levels.

5. How effective are the college's learning and teaching processes?

How well does the college design and deliver programmes and services to meet the needs of learners from all backgrounds and circumstances?

During teaching activities college staff make good use of opportunities to explore equality and diversity themes. The college promotes equality and diversity well through a range of college-wide events and cultural activities. Programmes include support activities such as taster sessions, workshops and tutorials which prepare learners from a range of backgrounds for college study very well. The college takes very good account of learners' individual support needs and implements a range of adjustments to reduce barriers to learning. Teaching and support staff provide helpful personalised support which promotes and develops learner confidence.

How well do learners learn?

Almost all learners are enthusiastic about their programme and engage actively in their own learning. They enjoy their studies and the learning and teaching approaches deployed by staff and participate enthusiastically during lessons. Learners make good use of resources, including recently improved ICT facilities, to develop skills for learning independently. The introduction of a tutorial approach to learning is working well for learners on HNC and SWAP programmes. Teaching staff set homework regularly and ask learners to bring work to tutorials. This encourages learners to complete preparatory work in their own time and prepares them well for HE level study.

Learners make good use of question and answer sessions in classes to develop skills in reflecting on their own learning. Learners' independent learning skills are developed effectively. The college intranet promotes independence in learning well and learners are increasingly confident in using ICT resources to extend their learning. During practical lessons, gradual withdrawal of teacher support helps learners to gain skills and confidence in learning independently.

How well do planning, teaching and the use of resources ensure effective learning?

Teaching staff take good account of learner needs and plan learning activities well. They use a variety of methods to engage learners including use of targeted questions. In most lessons teaching staff apply their extensive professional knowledge and use a range of appropriate resources effectively to support learners. Relationships between learners and teaching staff are exceptionally positive and are based on mutual respect which contributes to a supportive climate for learning. All staff support and encourage learners to produce work of a high standard. However, teaching staff do not always take opportunities to involve learners fully in planning their own learning during the early stages of their programme.

Sustainability themes are embedded effectively within programmes. The college has implemented an effective range of measures to ensure sustainability is promoted throughout the college. For example, in rural skills wood burning stoves have been installed in the teaching space to provide heat and promote sustainability. The new college intranet is being used productively to promote sustainability throughout the

college. Learning resources are provided electronically and learners are requested to provide their own paper for printing to reduce waste.

Teaching staff encourage learners to provide feedback on their preferred ways of learning. Staff take good account of these views when planning learning activities.

How well is assessment used to promote effective learning?

Programme teams plan assessments well and negotiate schedules with learners to enable them to manage their workload effectively. Learners feel well prepared for meeting assessment requirements. Teaching staff use an appropriate and relevant range of assessment approaches. They provide learners with helpful written and verbal feedback which affirms achievement and progress. Although most learners in the current year have not yet experienced formal unit assessment, they are confident that they are well prepared.

Effective processes are in place to identify and support learners who require adjustments to engage in assessment activities. Assessment arrangements for learners with additional support needs are effective and are put in place by staff timeously.

How well are potential and current learners provided with information, advice and support?

The college website provides useful and relevant information to potential learners about the range of programmes and support services available. Almost all learners report the on-line application process is straightforward and the interview process is very supportive. Most learners benefit from a range of induction experiences including taster weekends and external visits.

All learners feel very well supported by staff and appreciate the range of college support services. Identification of support needs is managed well by support staff and appropriate support arrangements are implemented quickly to minimise barriers to learning.

The college has established a strong culture of support for learners. Peer support is encouraged and promoted for residential learners. Returning learners contribute to supporting new learners. The *Support for Learning Tutor* coordinates the completion of all PLSPs. Guidance staff provide learners with comprehensive information about progression opportunities and higher education options. In the National Certificate (NC) Rural Skills programme most learners are well informed about the range of employment opportunities available to them and this is enhanced further by presentations from local employers. Curriculum and support staff work well together to provide general guidance to learners should they require it.

How well does the college sustain continuous enhancement of learning and teaching through self-evaluation and internal review activities?

Teaching staff contribute positively to the annual programme review process. Throughout the year, they engage productively in completing learning and teaching surveys, contributing to team meetings and attending quality meetings. Staff evaluate learner outcomes, learner feedback and curriculum-related issues and quickly arrange appropriate actions for improvement.

College staff collect learner feedback through post-entry surveys, mid-unit evaluations, on-going in-class discussions and online evaluations. Learner feedback is discussed and considered and actions for improvement are conveyed to learners through class representatives and *You Said/We Did* posters. Learners are confident their feedback is valued and has resulted in improvements to the learning environment and teaching processes.

The college has a well-established *Peer Observation* policy which teaching staff participate in annually. This process generates useful professional discussion and reflection on the quality of learning and teaching. Evaluative feedback is provided by the observer which often leads to changes in teaching practice. Regular, formal and informal staff meetings are used well to plan improvements and enhancements to programme delivery.

In-depth evaluation of the first year of the three new programmes has resulted in appropriate actions to improve design and delivery. During programme reviews staff take good account of learner needs and take action to bring about improvement. For example, additional Gaelic language classes for beginners were introduced in response to learner suggestions.

6. How well are learners engaged in enhancing their own learning and the work and life of the college?

How well do learners engage in enhancing their own learning?

Almost all learners take opportunities provided to them by teaching staff to identify their preferred ways of learning. Learners provide feedback on their learning experiences in a variety of ways including post-entry surveys, mid-unit evaluations, focus groups and fortnightly class representative meetings. Almost all learners make good use of timely and helpful feedback from teaching staff to improve and enhance their own learning. In one programme, some learners have established a study group to support different aspects of their learning. This study group is popular and well attended.

Learners know who their class representative is and the role that person plays in collating and expressing the views of their peers. They recognise how class representatives have influenced and brought about improvement. Class representatives are confident in their role and in collating and conveying the views of their peers. They are proactive in encouraging learners to do well and take responsibility for their own learning. All learners develop an individual PLSP. They use their PLSP as a basis for discussions with guidance tutors and to support reflection on progress and attainment. Where personalised individual support is required, learners engage productively with the Learner Support team.

Learners on the NC Rural Skills programme have created a tuck shop which they staff voluntarily to raise funds to support a class trip. This forms part of the Enterprise Skills unit and helps learners develop essential skills. Learners make good use of opportunities to participate in external visits and engage with external speakers to help inform future career choices.

How well do learners engage in enhancing the work and life of the college?

The SRC engages actively with the National Union of Students to access training and support. Elections for the posts of President and Vice President attracted a high turnout of voters, approximately 50% of the learner cohort. The SRC members represent learners on the Board of Directors and Board sub-committees including the Learning and Teaching Committee, the Health and Safety Committee and the Sustainability Committee. They are regular attenders and contribute well to discussions and decision making. SRC feedback and contributions have had significant influence on the refurbishment of the common room, leading to the purchase of a pool table and upgrade of the toilet areas. Learner representation on the Health and Safety Committee contributed to considerable investment and improvement to facilities within rural skills.

Learners participate actively in a range of focus groups. Improvements stemming from focus group discussions are conveyed to learners by college managers through class representatives and the SRC. One recent example of improvement, as a result of learner feedback, is the provision of lockers and the planning of shower facilities for non-residential learners. SRC members encourage learners and staff to promote and engage with extra-curricular activities and events. This includes support for national appeals as well as local community events, including, for example, *Christmas at Newbattle*.

Learners on the NC Rural Skills programme raise the college profile and enhance its reputation through engagement with local community projects. Community activities include clearing culverts and litter picking initiatives. These activities provide a useful opportunity for learners to develop employability skills and gain a better understanding of citizenship. Through the interests of learners, a *Green Team* has been established to consider actions on sustainability. This group of learners has agreed aims which will broaden the experience of learners and contribute to improvement within the wider community.

The *Newbattle Conversation* is a college-led initiative to engage the local and national community in discussion and debate. It incorporates a planned series of events, over a five-year period, and is used well to raise learners' awareness of, and interest in, topical issues of national importance. A number of learners benefit from involvement in the promotion and support of this annual event, undertaking tasks such as writing a report on the proceedings.

7. How well is the college led and how well is it enhancing the quality of its services for learners and other stakeholders?

The current Strategic Plan, which covers the period 2014-16, sets out clearly and appropriately the college's six strategic aims. These reflect national and regional imperatives. The college is successfully maintaining its role as Scotland's national adult education residential college while extending its provision to better meet the needs of its local communities. Sub-objectives have a relevant focus on opportunities for growth, while ensuring the quality of current provision. The college's Outcome Agreement (OA) for 2015-16 reflects clearly the college's national and local focus.

The college, with strong direction from the Board of Directors, is in the process of drafting its next strategic plan and finalising the OA for 2016-17. Strategic planning is well informed by national policy and economic developments and aligned to the aims of different stakeholders. The 2015-16 Operational Plan translates strategic aims into clearly expressed, achievable actions. All college staff are highly committed to delivering the college's strategic aims. They have responded particularly well to the increased pressures which rapid programme development has entailed.

In 2014-15, the college expanded its curriculum significantly. In addition to its existing portfolio, it introduced new full-time programmes in Social Sciences, Rural Skills and Celtic Studies. These recent curriculum developments reflect considered, creative planning by senior college staff who have actively sought new opportunities while maintaining the integrity of the college's core purpose. The new developments form part of the college's positive response to regionalisation and to Developing the Young Workforce. Effective liaison with key local and national partners is ensuring the college's growing curriculum has relevant entry points and progression pathways and builds on a suite of appropriate part-time community programmes.

The principal and the senior management team provide highly effective leadership for the college. The Learning and Teaching Committee provide a strong and helpful degree of challenge which ensures that any new proposals fit with the college's core purpose. Communication is generally good and motivation is positive amongst the staff cohort. However, almost half of the staff are employed on a part-time basis which can sometimes make communication within programme teams challenging. As a result, not all staff are able to contribute fully to planning and development. An effective, supportive *Personal Development and Review* process helps staff identify personal development needs.

The establishment of a reliable ICT service, provided jointly with Edinburgh College, is transforming learning and teaching for the better. Planning for new programmes has energised learning and teaching with teaching staff working together positively to explore new approaches. Staff discuss learning and teaching issues during team meetings and *Quality Days*, though this tends to focus mainly on planning or practical issues. New college programmes have performed well in their first year. Strategies for further reducing withdrawal and improving attainment are appropriate and are in place across all programmes.

Leadership for support services is highly effective. Individual managers and staff have a high degree of autonomy and take responsibility for ensuring an effective standard of service. This has supported the college well through the recent period of expansion.

Staff make a clear and positive contribution to discussions about the college's direction. The appointment of an ICT technician on the college campus has enhanced greatly the shared service with Edinburgh College. This is helping to raise the profile of ICT for learning and teaching and is contributing positively to the college's digital business infrastructure.

Over the last few years, a major increase in the number of learners who have mental health issues has caused the college to make adjustments to its support services and staff training arrangements. This has ensured that learners who are experiencing difficulties are identified early and receive appropriate, coordinated support. A number of support service functions have surveyed learners to gain feedback on current arrangements and have drawn up plans for improvement as a result. During *Quality Days*, support teams reflect constructively on their practice and make suggestions for improvement.

College staff are highly committed to providing the best possible learning experience for learners and to providing high levels of personal support. All staff engage positively in quality processes and in reflecting on their work and make a positive contribution to college *Quality Days*. Most staff participate constructively in regular team meetings and in informal professional discussions held with colleagues. The contribution of university staff to the development and moderation of the Associate Student degree programme has generated productive wider discussions across the college about programme design and delivery and assessment standards.

The college has a well-conceived annual quality cycle which consists of a range of processes which flow into and inform each other. These include an annual peer evaluation process which generates useful discussions about learning and teaching. The college gathers and analyses learner views in a range of appropriate ways and staff are responsive to the findings. Teaching staff and managers have a clear understanding of the reasons for learner withdrawal from programmes and have identified appropriate actions following analysis of performance indicators. These include adjustments to the timing of learner evaluations of learning and teaching, improved staff management of learner mental health issues and changes to programme design. Actions are monitored effectively through subsequent discussions held with senior and curriculum managers.

A range of actions has led to improvement in the current year. For example, facilities for rural studies learners have been refurbished which has had a significant impact on learner motivation. The reliability of ICT has improved which is enhancing learning and teaching. Adjustments to timetabling arrangements and sequencing of units have improved programme design across all areas.

8. How extensive and effective are college partnerships with communities, other learning providers, employers and agencies?

Strategic partnership working is a major strength of the college. Senior staff have established constructive relationships with a wide range of partners whose educational and social purposes align with those of the college. Partners have a very high regard for the college's clear commitment to learning as a transformational tool, for its leadership in realising initiatives and for the quality of what it delivers. The college's strong reputation for the quality of its adult learning has resulted in it taking the national lead in the development and accreditation of Adult Achievement Awards.

The college makes a significant contribution to the Midlothian Council Community Planning Partnership and chairs the MALP. It is also involved in other key local authority groups and initiatives, including Developing the Young Workforce group. This has led to successful delivery of a suite of community-based programmes which provide a good foundation for further study. Productive partnerships with other colleges and universities have underpinned the development of full-time programmes with clear progression pathways. For example, the college has worked constructively with staff at Queen Margaret University in the development and moderation of the successful Associate Student degree programme in Social Sciences. Learners benefit from the college's partnerships with other agencies, including for example, the Forestry Commission Scotland, which involves provision of work placements and sharing of resources. The college consults with key partners to formulate its strategic plans and OA. This helps ensure college provision continues to meet the needs of its various communities.

9. Signposting excellent practice

During the Education Scotland review week, the college submitted an example of what it considered to be excellent practice and the Education Scotland team also identified this as an example.

9.1 Developing the curriculum and progression opportunities through partnership

As Scotland's national, residential adult college, Newbattle Abbey College has delivered successful programmes for many years to learners in need of a second chance at education. Almost all learners progress successfully into further learning from the very strong foundation provided by the college.

Over the last few years, college senior managers recognised a need to provide an extended portfolio of programmes that was suitable for their learners and offered appropriate progression opportunities. The timing of this initiative coincided with a range of sectoral developments, including regionalisation, Developing Scotland's Young Workforce, the development of coherent planning structures within the local authority and strategic developments within a nearby university. The college worked closely with its key partners in the development and expansion of the curriculum to ensure future provision took good account of key priorities and directives.

As a result of this work, three new full-time programmes have been offered in the past year, in Rural Skills, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies. Staff worked in partnership with lead organisations to plan and develop the content of programmes and identify appropriate employment or further learning opportunities. The programmes provide clear pathways into further learning while capitalising on the strengths of the college's traditional curriculum and learning and support approaches. The partnerships have been instrumental in the college taking a lead role in development of The Adult Achievement Awards.

As a result of the expansion of the curriculum, the college is now providing a more appropriate range of programmes and has benefitted from partnership working in planning programme content and design. The curriculum offer is also now better aligned to the needs of local learners. As a result of these approaches more learners benefit from being able to access the programmes as a pathway to employment or further learning.

10. What is an overarching judgement?

Education Scotland uses an overarching judgement of *Effectiveness* to express the findings of the review team. The judgement of effectiveness takes into account all the evidence gathered through the external review. Such judgements express outcomes as:

effective;
limited effectiveness; or
not effective.

This judgement is further detailed by supporting statements which substantiate the judgement of effectiveness. Education Scotland evaluates and reports according to the three key principles. In this report, the principles and supporting statements relate to:

Key principle 1 – High quality learning (supporting statements numbers 1 and 2)

Key principle 2 – Learner engagement (supporting statement number 3)

Key principle 3 – Quality culture (supporting statement number 4)

Judgements of effectiveness and supporting statements provide stakeholders with assurances, or otherwise, about the quality of a college's provision. These judgements are based on trends and track record of a college, the findings at the time of the external review, and the college's capacity to continue improving.

A judgement of effective indicates that the college has in place **effective** arrangements to maintain and enhance the quality of its provision and outcomes for learners and other stakeholders. This judgement means that, in relation to quality assurance and enhancement, the college is led well, has sufficiently robust arrangements to address any minor weakness, and is likely to continue to improve the quality of its services for learners and other stakeholders.

A judgement of limited effectiveness indicates that the effectiveness of the college's arrangements to maintain and enhance the quality of its provision and outcomes for learners and other stakeholders is **limited**. This judgement means that there are some strengths in the college's arrangements for quality enhancement. However, there are weaknesses in arrangements for *high quality learning* and/or *learner engagement* and/or *quality culture*. If not addressed, the importance of these weaknesses will continue to **limit the effectiveness** of the college's arrangements.

A judgement of not effective indicates that the college's arrangements to maintain and enhance the quality of its provision and outcomes for learners and other stakeholders are **not effective**. This judgement means that there are significant weaknesses in the arrangements for *high quality learning* and/or *learner engagement* and/or *quality culture*. There is a high probability that, without significant and comprehensive action, with external monitoring and support, the college will fail to improve current low-quality provision and outcomes to an acceptable level. Education Scotland does not have evidence that the college has the capacity and commitment to identify and implement effective and comprehensive action.

Scottish Funding Council response to judgements

If the overarching judgement is **effective**, the Council will expect the college to engage with Education Scotland in follow-up activity, as appropriate, and, one year after the publication of the review reports, to provide a report, endorsed by its governing body (see *Council guidance to colleges on quality from August 2012*, paragraphs 62-66 [SFC/13/2012](#) setting out its response to the review.)

If the overarching judgement is of **limited effectiveness** or is **not effective**, the Council will require the institution to prepare and fulfil an action plan to address the shortcomings identified (see paragraph 67 of guidance). Education Scotland will provide advice to SFC on the adequacy of the action plan and on how it is being implemented. SFC, taking into account any advice from Education Scotland, will normally require a formal follow-up review at an appropriate time, usually within no more than two years.

11. What happens next?

Education Scotland will continue to monitor progress during annual engagement visits to the college.

There will be feedback to the learners at the college.

One year on from this report, the college will produce a report setting out what it has done to address the main points for action and/or areas for development in the report and other quality assurance and enhancement activities. There will be a link to this report from Education Scotland's website.

Dr John Laird
HM Inspector

12. Further information

The review and judgements relate to the college as a whole and do not provide information about individual programmes of study or subjects. For further information on these or any other queries, contact the college or look on its website - <http://www.newbattleabbeycollege.ac.uk/>.

For further information about Education Scotland, the external review methodologies, or other information about reviews, see www.educationscotland.gov.uk

For further information about the Scottish Funding Council, see – www.sfc.ac.uk

13. How can you contact us?

This report has been produced as a web-only publication and is available on our website at

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/othersectors/collegereviews/NewbattleAbbeyCollege.asp>.

If you would like to receive this report in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on 0131 244 4476.

If you want to give us feedback or make a complaint about our work, please contact us by telephone on 0131 244 4330, or e-mail: complaints@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk or write to us addressing your letter to The Complaints Manager, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Livingston, EH54 6GA.

Readability Survey

Alternatively if you are reading this report in hard copy please type the following address into your web browser.

http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/FEReadabilitysurvey130612_tcm4-719342.doc

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Appendix 1

Glossary of terms

CPP	Community Planning Partnership
FE	Further education
HE	Higher education
HNC	Higher National Certificate
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
MALP	Midlothian Adult Learning Partnership
NC	National Certificate
OA	Outcome Agreement
PLSP	Personal Learning Support Plan
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SRC	Student Representative Council
SWAP	Scottish Wider Access Programme
wSUM	Weighted student unit of measurement

Appendix 2

