College Progress Visit Report

South Lanarkshire College

26 May 2022

College Principal	**Liz McIntyre**
Progress Visit (PV) Date	**22 February 2022**
College Nominee	**Stella McManus**
Lead Inspector	**Barbara Nelson**
College HMI	**Ian Beach**
Outcome of Progress Visit	**Satisfactory progress**

Purpose of the progress visit

PVs are planned collaboratively between the college, Education Scotland and 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 South Lanarkshire College explored five overarching themes linked to the college's enhancement plan and priorities around COVID-19 recovery. The themes are:

- Curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment;
- Services to support learning;
- Learner engagement;
- Evaluation to facilitate improvement; and
- Learner progress and outcomes.

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Background and context

The college and its context

South Lanarkshire College is one of two colleges within the Lanarkshire region. Each college in the Region has its own Board of Management and is assigned to the Lanarkshire Regional Board. The Lanarkshire Regional Board ensures that consistency of provision across the Lanarkshire region. Currently the college is operating under interim leadership arrangements who are implementing a number of changes

Lanarkshire is the third largest Regional Skills Assessment (RSA) region in Scotland by population. The area has a medium-term forecast which predicts that Lanarkshire will possess 10% of all Scotland's job openings over the next few years. Expansion and replacement demand going forward will be for 43% of people to have higher level qualifications (SCQF 7-10).

The College delivers a range of further education (FE) and higher education (HE) programmes from Scottish Credit Qualification Framework (SCQF) Level 2 level 8.

The college works with South and North Lanarkshire and East Renfrewshire local authorities and a range of partners and stakeholders in its local community. This includes partnership with local schools, delivery of Senior Phase opportunities for young people.

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Findings from the progress visit

Curriculum, learning and teaching and assessment

Areas of positive progress

- College senior leaders have a clear and shared vision which is reflected in the college's strategic plan for excellence in delivery. These plans include development of a learning and teaching strategy which includes a digital strategy. However, this has been interrupted by COVID-19 and ongoing internal issues.

- The recently introduced curriculum planning process has been welcomed by staff. Programme teams take good account of the local economic context and Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) to ensure appropriate progression opportunities for learners. They are reflecting on their response to delivery and the environment for learning post COVID-19 and are using this experience to influence curriculum panning.

- Teaching staff are flexible and have adjusted teaching approaches to take into account the impact of COVID-19. The college has remained partially open to learners and staff throughout the pandemic to provide a safe space for learning and essential access to resources. Innovative changes to delivery approaches include evening sessions, recorded lessons and virtual work placements. Staff comment that these work well for learners who benefit from focused support and teaching assistance. Teaching staff recognise this model of delivery offers a more equitable experience for learners who can access provision at a time and place to suit their lifestyle.

- The college supports the digital upskilling of staff and learners very well. This approach ensures learners have the skills required to engage effectively in their programme. Teaching teams make good use of Microsoft Teams to deliver teaching sessions and communicate with learners. They adapt teaching styles and use a variety of approaches to engage learners to ensure they take responsibility for their learning. Teaching teams recognise communication within and across teams has improved over the pandemic period and there is willingness to reach out for support and share best practice approaches.

- Teaching and support teams collaborate well together and focus on quality improvements that benefit learners. Information Technology Champions support teaching teams well in the delivery of remote learning, through use of recorded videos, streaming channels and conference cameras. This impacts positively on learner's knowledge and understanding.

- A few curriculum areas use Virtual Employment Placements effectively and support online meetings with mentors to help overcome the shortage of work placements. Within childcare programmes, a number of local nurseries provided helpful work placement experiences.

- Programme teams have made significant adjustments to assessment arrangements in line with national guidance from awarding bodies. These include: a move away from closed-book to open book assessments; Care Foundation Apprenticeship assessment online, and the use of simulated practices for community nursing courses. This influenced the curriculum scheduling particularly for practical courses where teams responded innovatively to capturing evidence through time-lapse photography, social networks and video.

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- Guidance tutors provide helpful support to learners by working with all learner groups, including regular one-to-one discussion opportunities. Guidance tutors refer non-curriculum issues to support services through clearly defined channels. To mitigate withdrawals most curriculum staff text or telephone learners when learner absenteeism becomes an issue. If required, this is then escalated to Student Services.

- The Marketing team interact well with curriculum teams to promote college programmes and learner success. They provide videos and newsletters, visit schools to promote and inform opportunities, hold open evenings. The college has recently introduced a new post of School Development Officer to improve school-college awareness of college programmes and liaise with school staff more effectively.

Area for further progress and actions required

- In most subject areas, there is a lack of clarity regarding the skills that learners are developing, including meta skills. Learners do not yet experience a consistent approach to skills development across teams. There is a need to ensure all staff are familiar with developing and embedding these aspects of learning within the curriculum across the college.

Services to support learning

Areas of positive progress

- The college provides a high standard of wrap around services, which impact positively on learner retention and student outcomes.

- Support teams adapted well to COVID-19. They quickly upskilled staff and moved services online to ensure continuity of service to learners. Staff comment there has been increased engagement from learners who now feel more confident accessing support services and staff can respond timeously to requests.

- The counselling team make classroom visits to promote their services. They have developed support sessions to reflect student demand, for example: “Coping with Covid”; strength and resilience workshops; and dealing with stress, anxiety and sleeplessness. In addition, the college has trained 23 staff as mental health first aiders to further build capacity to support learners This is effective in developing resilience and raising learner awareness of services on offer. Counselling staff promote their support services well to staff and learners making good use of videos and newsletters to improve accessibility to services.

- A range of workshops have been developed to support the resilience and mental health of learners and staff, and to provide signposting to support service provision. The college recognises the challenge of mental health, particularly among male students, and have targeted particular curriculum areas such as Construction, and as a result more young males are now accessing support.

- Support service teams collaborate well with curriculum staff and there are many examples of changes and improvements that have been implemented to support learners. For example

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the Learner Development team used a range of innovative techniques to engage learners with Additional Support Needs (ASN) during periods of college closures, involving support workers and families. They also took a holistic approach, offering a seven day phone check in, to ensure all students had food and were not at risk.

- The college recognise the challenges that some learners experience in accessing learning caused by digital poverty. The IT team provided a high level of support during the pandemic including issuing a range of equipment and technical support and training. This included providing training for families and support workers directly to encourage and support them to assist vulnerable learners with the switch to remote learning.

- The college has developed separate student support services contact arrangements and a help desk to support direct contact for learners. This enables learners to access services outwith standard college opening times. Large numbers of learners are aware of the service and value the support they receive.

- To support remote learner access to library service provision, library staff increased their stock of e-books and removed all fines for non-returns. They also made it easier for learners to pick up and drop off of library books and learning materials along with easier access to online resources. Learners valued this service.

Area for further progress and actions required

- Support Service Managers are overly reliant on the informal communication across different support service teams. There is a potential risk to individual learners of falling through the gaps and the college not having a holistic picture of individual learners and the support needs.

Learner engagement

Areas of positive progress

- South Lanarkshire College Student Association is fully represented across all the associated committees and their contribution to meetings is highly valued by staff and board members.

- Almost all classes have a class representative, supported by the quality manager, to ensure the student voice is represented collectively in course team evaluations and enhancement plans. All class representatives receive Student Partnership in Quality Scotland (sparqs) training and are positive about how this training helped them carry out their role.

- Specialist training from sparqs to engage more males to participate in the student association has been highly effective in increasing the numbers of young males representing their class groups.

- Class representatives meet regularly with senior staff to provide feedback on their college experiences. Staff recognise the value of this approach and use this well to inform action planning for improvement. Most learners can give examples of how improvements have resulted after they had given feedback at programme team meetings.

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- Almost all learners are aware of the wide range of opportunities that are available to them to give feedback on their experiences. They value this and feel they are listened to and their opinions are valued.

- The college is making increasing use of social media to engage learners in college life. This is impacting positively on learner confidence and learners share their learning experiences and showcase their work.

- Almost all learners had a positive pre-enrolment experience prior to starting on their programme. Well-planned recruitment, enrolment and induction arrangements prepared them well for their programme. This included helpful training from curriculum staff on how to make best use of online platforms.

- All learners are very positive about their college experience and value the support they receive from staff to achieve their aspirations. The approach that "no learner gets left behind" is effective in building confidence with learner groups. Teaching staff collaborate well to identify learners not engaging in their programme. They have a range of strategies to help re engage these learners through learning and teaching or support services, depending on individuals' requirements.

- Almost all learners are aware of the opportunities to provide feedback to the college. These include a student portal, questionnaires, regular discussions with curriculum staff and feedback forms after Student Support Services events or services. Class reps engage well in discussions with college managers about what is working well and not so well. A few learners engage with the Student Question Time (hustings approach) which is held each year. Learners use this opportunity to meet with a panel of college managers to ask direct questions about their college experience, which managers respond to and record to feed in to improvement plans.

Areas for further progress and actions required

- Overall, learner participation in the Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey (SSES) return is low (35%) with too few learners using this as a means to express their views.

- The Student Association and class representatives would benefit from more opportunity to work and meet together, share thinking and agree actions.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

Areas of positive progress

- Recently introduced and revised evaluation arrangements have resulted in a streamlined evaluation processes across all areas of the college. College Managers have made good progress in communicating and implementing this change to programme and support services. Staff welcome these changes and report a simpler and more timely process that empowers them to take action and implement curriculum changes that benefit learners. Early indications indicate more engagement in the process than before. However, it is too early to fully evaluate its impact across college.

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- Quality staff have created course information “hubs” to retain all documentation for the new evaluation cycle in a central location. This includes PI data, course evaluations, enhancement and action plans, best practice and learner survey data. Curriculum managers are now able to access and update all relevant documents related to each programme area for review and analysis.

- The new Faculty Review, which replaced the Academic Board, provides a platform for curriculum managers to highlight positive aspects of their curriculum provision alongside those programmes performing below target. Managers appreciate the opportunity to discuss programme performance, which includes focused questions that feed better in to curriculum planning. Staff strongly support this new approach which also allows for the discussion and sharing of best practice.

- The college has clear improvement targets for all modes of attendance. Managers use these targets effectively in self-evaluation to assess progress against desired outcomes and to develop clear action plans based on this analysis.

- The college is currently developing a more responsive reporting process to support curriculum teams and board members to analyse Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and learner data more effectively. Board members are provided with a dashboard that supports board committees to identify relevant data and analyse trends in college performance. Training has been provided for staff and board members to enable them to interrogate KPI reports effectively.

- Curriculum teams meet regularly to discuss learner issues and develop actions for improvement. They make good use of key performance indicator data, LMI and the learner voice to support their evaluations to influence the college’s improvement priorities and curriculum planning. Teams highlight examples of Best Practice in learning and teaching which are considered for further dissemination across the college

- The Quality Enhancement Group oversees the enhancement of learning and teaching. The Professional Dialogue on Learning and Teaching (PDLT) provides opportunities for the review of learning and teaching standards and informs themes for professional development of teaching staff.

- The Operational and Curriculum Manager’s forum (OMCM) is effective in providing opportunities for cross-college discussions about improvement priorities and the sharing of emerging practice across curriculum and services to support learning teams.

Area for further progress and actions required

- The findings of the Professional Discussion of Learning and Teaching (PDLT) are not shared widely with teaching staff to support the dissemination of emerging practice.

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Learner progress and outcomes

Areas of positive progress

- Most learners who enrol on a college programme are successful and attain a certificated award.
- Most learners completing their programme move on to a positive destination such as another college programme, higher education or employment.
- Attainment rates for all modes of learning have been above the national sector performance level for the past three years.
- The attainment rate for learners with a disability is five percentage points above the national sector performance level of 68%.
- Most learners can articulate their career pathway intentions and how their college studies reflect the needs of their chosen industry. This is supporting learners' progress towards their employment goal.
- A few college programmes have achieved an improvement in learner attainment and retention as a result of switching to a blended learning delivery approach.
- In some programme areas, the hybrid approach adopted by curriculum teams has improved retention, as learners are less anxious, do not need to travel and do not have concerns over childcare or caring responsibilities.
- Curriculum teams are able to articulate the reasons behind low outcomes for particular programmes. They use this information to put in place actions to improve outcomes for learners.

Areas for further progress and actions required

- Based on current college data, attainment rates for FTFE learners in 2020/21 have declined and are lower than in previous years.

What happens next?

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

Barbara Nelson
HM Inspector

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