Item: 5

Education, Leisure and Housing Committee: 7 June 2023.

Orkney College – Annual Engagement Visit.

Report by Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing.

1. Purpose of Report

To present the findings of Education Scotland's Annual Engagement Visit to Orkney College in February 2023.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note:

2.1.

That Education Scotland undertook the Annual Engagement Visit to Orkney College on 14 February 2023, with the letter and report on the progress visit attached as Appendices 1 and 2 respectively to this report.

2.2.

The five national themes which Annual Engagement Visits include, namely:

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

2.3.

The overall outcome from the Annual Engagement Visit for Orkney College, in that Education Scotland is confident that the college has made satisfactory progress and has the capacity to continue to improve.

The Committee is invited to scrutinise:

2.4.

The inspection findings contained in Education Scotland's Annual Engagement Visit Report, attached as Appendix 2 to this report, in order to obtain assurance that action has been taken or agreed as necessary.

3. Background

3.1.

On 23 January 2023, the Assistant Principal was informed by Education Scotland that Orkney College would receive its Annual Engagement Visit on 14 February 2023.

3.2.

The five national themes which Education Scotland Progress Visits include were identified as:

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

3.3.

The previous progress visit of April 2022 had highlighted areas for further progress and actions required in the following areas:

3.3.1. Curriculum, Learning and teaching and assessment

- Prior to the pandemic, most subject areas had begun to incorporate meta skills and Career Management Skills (CMS) within programmes. However, progress was interrupted due to the impact of COVID-19 and as a result meta skills and CMS are not yet embedded across all programmes.
- The complexity of requirements for the college to respond to the Council for Further Education level provision, and UHI for Higher Education level provision constrains the ability and agility of college managers to plan cohesive and efficient curriculum pathways.

3.3.2. Services to support learning

Referral arrangements between support service teams and curriculum staff could at times be reliant on informal communication. This reduced the ability of the college to capture fully the range of support being delivered to learners across the college.

3.3.3. Learner engagement

The effectiveness of class representation across FE level programmes was inconsistent, with only a limited number of class groups having a nominated class representative. This limits opportunities for capturing the learner voice.

3.4.

No actions were identified within the following areas:

- Evaluation to facilitate improvement.
- Learner Progress and Outcomes.

3.5.

The Annual Engagement Visit would also consider the effectiveness of college approaches to self-evaluation and planning for improvement, and consider progress made against identified priorities.

3.6.

The Inspectors would identify what was working well and aspects where further improvement may still be required.

3.7.

The visit would also consider key indicators of performance, and the impact on the learning experience through the lens of recruitment, retention, attainment and progression.

4. Summary of Inspection

4.1.

The Annual Engagement Visit Report, with the letter and report on the progress visit attached as Appendices 1 and 2 to this report, outlines positive progress, together with areas for development.

4.2.

The overall outcome from the Progress Visit for the College is Education Scotland is confident that the college has made satisfactory progress against actions raised in the previous visit, referred to at section 3.3 above, and has the capacity to continue to improve.

5. Corporate Governance

This report relates to the Council complying with governance and scrutiny and therefore does not directly support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.

6. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

7. Legal Aspects

There are no legal implications arising directly from the recommendations of this report.

8. Contact Officers

James Wylie, Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, extension 2477, Email james.wylie@orkney.gov.uk.

Peter Diamond, Head of Education, extension 2436, Email: peter.diamond@orkney.gov.uk.

Jane Partridge, Service Manager (Secondary and Tertiary Education), extension 2419, Email jane.partridge@orkney.gov.uk.

Joanne Wallace, Interim Principal, Orkney College, telephone 569000, Email joanne.wallace@uhi.ac.uk.

9. Appendices

Appendix 1: Orkney College Education Scotland Progress Visit letter May 2023.

Appendix 2: Orkney College Education Scotland Progress Visit report May 2023.

23 May 2023

Joanne Wallace
Interim Principal
UHI Orkney College

Dear Ms Wallace,

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited UHI Orkney College in February 2023 to undertake an Annual Engagement Visit. During our visit, we talked to learners, staff, and stakeholders, and worked closely with the senior managers.

The team found the following major strengths in the college's work:

Recruitment

Improved collaboration between college curriculum teams and staff from local secondary schools has resulted in significant growth in recruitment of school-age learners and the overall number of learners aged 16-19 has increased. Teaching departments have adjusted the curriculum portfolio to provide senior phase learners with improved entry and progression routes from further education (FE) to higher education (HE) level programmes. Teaching staff and support departments coordinate a range of helpful activities to maintain engagement with successful applicants prior to the start of programmes. College leaders work collaboratively with Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) coordinators and the local employability hub to raise awareness of the range of curriculum pathways available to young people. Learners feel well supported by staff during the recruitment process and they report the college website and information provided by the college prior to application is helpful and informative.

Retention

The overall rate of withdrawal for learners on both full-time and part-time FE programmes is significantly lower than the sector norm. Teaching staff encourage learners to build positive relationships with staff and peers from the start of their programmes. This helps to create a supportive environment for learning and is contributing to overall learner retention. The revised induction process is ensuring learners are well-informed about the full range of support services available to them from the start of their programme. Increased collaboration with curriculum areas is enabling support staff to respond quickly to address learners' needs and improve retention. Access to free breakfasts and a college foodbank is enabling learners experiencing significant financial hardship to stay at college. Learners feel comfortable about contributing their views to teaching staff and are confident that change is implemented in response to their feedback. All curriculum and support teams proactively seek feedback from learners on their college experience and involve learners in decision making to improve curriculum delivery and support services.

Attainment

Overall rates of attainment for learners on full-time and part-time FE programmes are higher than the sector norm. Overall rates of learner success for those an ethnic minority background and those with a disability are higher than the sector norm. Most curriculum areas implement alternative assessment arrangements that take good account of individual circumstances. This is contributing to high levels of learner attainment. Meta skills are embedded well within the curriculum with some programmes including employability awards and work-based experiences that support learners well to develop skills and attitudes that are advantageous in a range of employment sectors. Staff embed awareness of the world of work within most FE programmes and curriculum teams have begun to map Career Management Skills (CMS) within programmes. Most curriculum areas make effective use hybrid delivery to expand learning opportunities and develop learners' skills and experience of using different learning platforms. The data services team worked collaboratively with curriculum staff to implement new arrangements to improve attainment. This is providing a stronger focus on programme set-up and analysis of performance indicator data. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of improving learner outcomes. Almost all learners report that staff plan programmes well and provide learning experiences that help them to attain. College managers facilitate a range of professional reflection and evaluation activities that engage curriculum managers productively in improving outcomes for learners. Increased opportunities for curriculum teams to share experiences are helping to share examples of best practice.

Progression

Learner progression to a positive destination on leaving college is high. Learners are supported well by staff to engage in discussions to understand, recognise and articulate their skills. This provides learners with confidence and insight to explore progression opportunities and future career pathways. Curriculum managers work well with industry partners to offer a curriculum that meets the needs of local employers and make good use of Labour Market Intelligence and employment trends to inform lesson content. This is helping to address the current and projected challenges in the region and address skills gaps and shortages. Almost all learners speak positively of the information and support they receive from staff to explore and select progression routes to further learning or employment.

The following areas for improvement were identified by the team and discussed with senior managers:

- There has been a 17% decline in recruitment of learners over the age of 26.

- Class representatives are not yet in place across all FE programmes and learners are not sufficiently aware of the role of Highland and Islands Student Association (HISA).

- New arrangements for programme set-up and analysis of performance indicator data have not yet been evaluated to measure impact on attainment.

- Partial success rates for FE are higher than the sector norm.

Main points for action

The following main points for action are required:

- The college should ensure that all FE programmes have a class representative in place.

- HISA should work with the college to ensure FE learners are made aware of their role and function.

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 through on-going engagement with the link HM Inspector.

Barbara Nelson
HM Inspector

Annual Engagement Visit Report

UHI Orkney

16/05/2023

College Principal	**Joanne Wallace (interim)**
Annual Engagement Visit Date	**14 February 2023**
College Nominee	**Joanne Wallace**
College HMI	**Barbara Nelson**

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. The data referred to throughout this report relates to academic year 2020/2021.

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

Orkney College UHI is an academic partner of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) and is the only college in Scotland governed by a local authority, via the Orkney Islands Council (OIC).

The college delivers a range of further education (FE) and higher education (HE) provision from campuses in Kirkwall and Stromness. The college is an active partner in the recently established Islands Forum to share common curriculum developments across the northern and western isles.

3.   Summary of findings

3.1   Recruitment

Learner Progress and Outcomes

Areas of positive progress

- Improved collaboration between college curriculum teams and staff from local secondary schools has resulted in significant growth in recruitment of school-age learners.

- In recent years there has been a 6% increase in the number of learners aged under 16 enrolling on a college programme and the overall number of learners aged 16-19 has increased.

Curriculum, Learning and teaching and assessment

- Curriculum teams are working productively to introduce flexible and part-time programmes to accommodate the needs of learners who have work or caring commitments.

- Teaching departments have adjusted the curriculum portfolio to provide senior phase learners with improved entry and progression routes from FE to HE level programmes.

- Curriculum teams collaborate well with school staff to ensure senior phase learners are placed on an appropriate level and type of programme to meet their individual needs and aspirations.

- Curriculum managers plan programmes well to meet emerging economic and cultural need, and to support learner health and wellbeing. The alignment of college programmes to these themes has improved the choice of pathways for FE learners and helps them to make informed course decisions.

- Teaching departments coordinate a range of helpful activities to maintain engagement with successful applicants prior to the start of programmes. This includes providing opportunities to improve digital and numeracy skills.

- Curriculum leaders work collaboratively with the Orkney Islands Council to update their understanding of the delivery rationale. This is improving the responsiveness to working arrangements and supporting more timely interventions and changes to occur.

Services to support learning

- Support staff build positive relationships with prospective learners. They support applicants well to make informed decisions about their choice of programme and funding arrangements.

- Staff monitor applications to ensure that applicants who disclose an additional support need receive support to progress through the recruitment process with confidence.

- Admissions and curriculum staff have worked together to establish formal referral arrangements that enable staff to work collaboratively to plan and coordinate support for learners prior to commencing their course.

- College leaders work collaboratively with Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) coordinators and the local employability hub to raise awareness of the range of curriculum pathways available to young people.

Learner engagement

- Learners feel well supported by staff during the recruitment process. They report the college website and information provided by the college prior to application is helpful and informative.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

- Curriculum leaders in computing recently evaluated the National Progression Award (NPA) offer to schools and have drawn on the findings to introduce guaranteed places on full-time programmes.

- College staff have highlighted the impact of a shortage of housing and student accommodation in Orkney on learner recruitment and retention. College managers are working well with staff from the local authority to address this issue.

- A recently introduced college-wide dashboard is supporting staff to monitor learner recruitment. However, this is still at an early stage of implementation, and it is too early to measure the impact on recruitment.

Areas for development

- There has been a 17% decline in recruitment of learners over the age of 26.

3.2   Retention

Areas of positive progress

Learner Progress and Outcomes

- The overall rate of withdrawal for learners on both full-time and part-time FE programmes is significantly lower than the sector norm.

Curriculum, Learning and teaching and assessment

- Teaching staff encourage learners to build positive relationships with staff and peers from the start of their programmes. This helps to create a supportive environment for learning and is contribution to overall learner retention.

- Course teams provide good opportunities for learners to co-design programmes for example, through selection of optional units. This is enabling learners to tailor programmes to their individual needs and aspirations.

Services to support learning

- The revised induction process is ensuring learners are well-informed about the full range of support services available to them from the start of their programme.

- Increased collaboration with curriculum areas is enabling support staff to respond quickly to address learners' needs and improve retention.

- The college laptop loan scheme is helping learners to access learning on and off-campus and supporting them to remain on their programme.

- Access to free breakfasts and a college foodbank is enabling learners experiencing significant financial hardship to stay at college.

Learner engagement

- Learners benefit from positive relationships with staff and their peers. They report staff are approachable and supportive.

- Learners feel comfortable about contributing their views to teaching staff and are confident that change is implemented in response to their feedback

- In some curriculum areas, learners approaching the end of their programme share their experience of the college and offer advice. This is helpful and motivating for new learners.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

- All curriculum and support teams proactively seek feedback from learners on their college experience and involve learners in decision making to improve curriculum delivery and support services.

- Training for staff on how to interpret the data dashboard and raise awareness of the range of targeted support available, is helping staff identify interventions to support learners who are at risk of withdrawing.

Areas for development

- Class representatives are not yet in place across all FE programmes and learners are not sufficiently aware of the role of Highland and Islands Student Association (HISA).

3.3   Attainment

Areas of positive progress

Learner Progress and Outcomes

- Overall rates of attainment for learners on full-time FE programmes are higher than the sector norm at 70.4%.

- Overall rates of attainment for learners on part-time FE programmes are higher than the sector norm at 93.9%

- Overall rates of learner success for those from an ethnic minority background are higher than the sector norm at 79%.

- Overall rates of learner success for those with a disability are higher than the sector norm at 82%.

Curriculum, Learning and teaching and assessment

- Most curriculum areas implement alternative assessment arrangements that take good account of individual circumstances. This is contributing to high levels of learner attainment.

- Meta skills are embedded well within the curriculum. Some programmes include employability awards and work-based experiences that support learners well to develop skills and attitudes that are advantageous in a range of employment sectors.

- Staff embed awareness of the world of work within most FE programmes and curriculum teams have begun to map Career Management Skills (CMS) within programmes.

- Most curriculum areas make effective use of hybrid delivery to expand learning opportunities and develop learners' skills and experience of using different learning platforms.

- Almost all curriculum areas continue to make good use of the college Virtual Learning Environment to enable learners to revise or catch-up on lessons they may have missed.

Services to support learning

- The data services team worked collaboratively with curriculum staff to implement new arrangements to improve attainment. This is providing a stronger focus on programme set-up and analysis of performance indicator data. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of improving learner outcomes.

Learner engagement
- Almost all learners report that staff plan programmes well and provide learning experiences that help them to attain.

- Learners benefit from active learning approaches and integrated assessments to support them to confidently apply knowledge of theory into practice.

- Inter-generational learning is enriching the learning experience and learners of different ages are benefitting from opportunities to collaborate and learn from each other.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

- Curriculum teams make good use of feedback from formative and summative assessments to inform and enhance learning and teaching processes.

- College managers facilitate a range of professional reflection and evaluation activities that engage curriculum managers productively in improving outcomes for learners.

- Teaching staff are encouraged and supported well to be creative in planning learning and teaching. Increased opportunities for curriculum teams to share experiences are helping to share examples of best practice.

Areas for development

- New arrangements for programme set-up and analysis of performance indicator data have not yet been evaluated to measure impact on attainment.

- Partial success rates for FE are higher than the sector norm.

3.4   Progression

Areas of positive progress

Learner Progress and Outcomes

- Learner progression to a positive destination is high, with 96.3% of learners entering a positive destination on leaving college.

Curriculum, Learning and teaching and assessment

- Learners are supported well by staff to engage in discussions to understand, recognise and articulate their skills. This provides learners with confidence and insight to explore progression opportunities and future career pathways.

- Curriculum managers regularly arrange for previous learners to return to the college to engage with current learners. Learners are motivated by these visits to explore potential progression routes.

- Curriculum managers work well with industry partners to offer a curriculum that meets the needs of local employers. Curriculum staff make good use of Labour Market Intelligence and employment trends to inform lesson content. This is helping to address the current and projected challenges in the region and address skills gaps and shortages.

Services to support learning

- Support staff operate a helpful open-door policy and offer support for learners completing UCAS applications.

Learner engagement

- Almost all learners speak positively of the information and support they receive from staff to explore and select progression routes to further learning or employment.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

- College staff collaborate with local secondary schools to evaluate the quality of provision for school-based learners and to plan for improvement. This is helping to improve progression opportunities for school-age young people.

Areas for development

- None identified

4.   Main Points for Action

The following main points for action are required:

- The college should ensure that all FE programmes have a class representative in place.

- HISA should work with the college to ensure FE learners are made aware of their role and function.

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 through on-going engagement with the link HM Inspector.

Barbara Nelson
HM Inspector