

Item: 6

College Management Council Sub-committee: 2 November 2020.

Education Scotland: Progress Visit Inspection – Orkney College.

Report by Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing.

1. Purpose of Report

To advise of the findings of Education Scotland's Progress Visit inspection carried out on 19 and 20 February 2020.

2. Recommendations

The Sub-committee is invited to note:

2.1.

That, in 2018, all colleges produced an Evaluative Report and Enhancement Plan which were endorsed by the Scottish Funding Council and Education Scotland.

2.2.

That, during Progress Visits, colleges demonstrate how well they are delivering on the targets and milestones identified in the Enhancement Plan, as well as outlining any changes to circumstances resulting in revisions to the original objectives.

2.3.

That Progress Visits provide reassurance to key stakeholders on the effectiveness of improvement actions undertaken by individual colleges.

2.4.

That, whilst undertaking Progress Visits, HM Inspectors of Education take account of the context and individual nature of each college.

2.5.

That Orkney College was inspected by Education Scotland in February 2020, with the Report of the Progress Visit, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, which has been endorsed by Education Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council.

2.6.

That the areas of review considered during the Progress Visit on 19 and 20 February 2020 related to targets and milestones from the Enhancement Plan, which covered:

- Outcomes and Impact.
- Delivery of learning and services to support learning.
- Leadership and quality culture.

2.7.

That the areas of review received a satisfactory grading which was also the overall outcome from the Progress Visit for the College.

2.8.

That further areas of work and progress were identified for the College, in line with advancing the enhancement plan outlined in the original Evaluative Report and Enhancement Plan.

It is recommended:

2.9.

That the Sub-committee scrutinise the inspection findings, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, in order to obtain assurance that progress with actions in the Enhancement Plan is satisfactory.

3. Background

3.1.

In December 2016, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) published guidance on major changes to the quality assurance and enhancement arrangements for colleges in Scotland. Further guidance was issued in April 2018.

3.2.

In 2018, all colleges produced an Evaluative Report and Enhancement Plan (EREP) which were endorsed by the SFC and Education Scotland. During Progress Visits (PV), colleges demonstrate how well they are delivering on the targets and milestones identified in their Enhancement Plan (EP). These visits also provide an opportunity for colleges to outline any changes to their circumstances resulting in revisions to their original objectives. Progress Visits provide reassurance to key stakeholders on the effectiveness of improvement actions undertaken by individual colleges. Whilst undertaking PVs, HM Inspectors of Education take account of the context and individual nature of each college.

4. Summary of Inspection

4.1.

On 19 and 20 February 2020, Orkney College was inspected by Education Scotland. During the visit, inspectors talked to students, Highlands and Islands Student Association (HISA), staff, the Senior Management Team, the Principal, and the Chair of the College Management Council Sub-committee.

4.2.

At the end of the PV, HM Inspectors of Education, Associate Assessors and Student Team Members reviewed the evidence gathered during their discussions with college managers, staff, learners, and stakeholders. They assessed the progress that the College has made with its Enhancement Plan (EP), taking account of any changes to local circumstances. Based on this evidence, the team formed a view as to whether the College has made satisfactory progress with actions in its EP, or had not made satisfactory progress with actions in its EP. This outcome is contained within the Inspection Report.

4.3.

The College Progress Visit report, as endorsed by Education Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council, is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. For comparison the endorsed Evaluative Report and Enhancement Plan for Orkney College UHI can be found at <https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/inspection-reports/reports-page/?id=5499>.

4.4.

The inspection team found that Orkney College, rated as very good in the previous Evaluative Report and Enhancement Plan, has made, and continues to make, satisfactory progress in respect of meeting the enhancement plan. Details of progress made, and further development are provided in the Progress Visit Report attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

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 significant financial implications arising from this noting report.

7. Legal Aspects

The Council should comply with all legal recommendations made and subject to that, there are no legal implications arising from this report.

8. Contact Officers

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9. Appendix

Appendix 1: Progress Visit Report.

College Progress Visit Report

Orkney College UHI

February 2020

College Principal	Edward Abbott-Halpin
Progress Visit Date	18-19 February 2020
College Nominee	Donna Wishart
Managing Inspector	Ian Beach
College HMI	John Bowditch
SFC Outcome Agreement Manager	Seamus Spencer
Outcome of Progress Visit	Satisfactory progress

Background and context

The college and its context

Orkney College UHI is an academic partner of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI). Within this regional partnership, the college is responsible for delivering an agreed volume of credits for the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). The college is governed by a sub-committee of the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee of Orkney Islands Council (OIC).

The college delivers a range of higher education, degree and postgraduate programmes, alongside its further education (FE) curriculum, from campuses in Kirkwall and Stromness. College managers have repositioned the curriculum portfolio to provide transition and progression routes for learners from the senior phase through to higher education. The college is an active partner in the recently-established Islands Forum, which shares common curriculum developments across the northern and western isles.

The current principal took up post in January 2019 and has led a period of transition after several managers left the college. Three new college managers have been appointed recently for the quality assurance, student records and finance functions.

Purpose of the progress visit

In 2018, all colleges produced an Evaluative Report and Enhancement Plan (EREP) which were endorsed by the SFC and Education Scotland. During Progress Visits (PV), colleges demonstrate how well they are delivering on the targets and milestones identified in their Enhancement Plan (EP). These visits also provide an opportunity for colleges to outline any changes to their circumstances resulting in revisions to their original objectives. Progress Visits provide reassurance to key stakeholders on the effectiveness of improvement actions undertaken by individual colleges. Whilst undertaking PVs, HM Inspectors of Education take account of the context and individual nature of each college.

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 each college has made with its EP, taking account of any changes to local circumstances. Based on this evidence, the team forms a view as to whether the college has made satisfactory progress with actions in its EP, or has not made satisfactory progress with actions in its EP. This outcome is contained within this report, with accompanying commentary to support the findings.

The endorsed EREP for Orkney College UHI can be found at:

<https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/inspection-reports/reports-page/?id=5499>

Findings from the progress visit

Outcomes and impact

Areas of positive progress

- The college continues to perform well against national benchmarks. However there has been a downward trend in outcomes over the past three years for learners on full-time FE programmes. College managers have a clear focus on strategies to improve learner retention and attainment rates for subject areas that have experienced a decline in learner outcomes.
- With an annual enrolment of around 100 learners on FE programmes, minor variations in learner numbers can produce significant variations in college performance indicators. The college is developing a bespoke version of the SFC performance indicator tool relevant to Orkney College UHI to reduce the influence of comparisons between large and small data sets. A recently-appointed management information specialist is working across UHI to take this development forward.
- College managers have improved the engagement of curriculum teams in the analysis of programme performance data. Managers and staff are highly aware of the reasons for non-completion of each individual learner. They use national performance indicator data well for benchmarking, and to identify actions to improve college programmes.
- Curriculum teams have engaged well with training opportunities for the Skills Development Scotland (SDS) data hub and are now interrogating programme data better to help inform curriculum planning. College staff attend relevant UHI committees, such as the Quality Forum, and regional meetings to discuss programme performance trends across the UHI partnership.
- The college has progressed well with the alignment of the curriculum to meet the needs of the local economy. For example, sport programmes have been added recently to the curriculum portfolio to meet the increased interest in sport around the upcoming Island Games in 2023. College managers have a clear focus on broadening the FE portfolio, particularly in relation to Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) and the apprenticeship family. The college has well-developed plans to introduce SVQs and Modern Apprenticeships (MA) in hospitality, agriculture, engineering and farm management. The college has doubled the number of Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects offered in the past three years.

Areas of further progress and actions required

- College managers should continue to roll out plans for performance tools and processes that support curriculum teams to analyse and reflect on programme performance.

Delivery of learning and services to support learning

Areas of positive progress

- The college continues to support the Scottish Government's Youth Employment strategy, Developing the Young Workforce (DYW), through strong collaborative working with key partners. These partners include SDS, local secondary schools, DYW Orkney and local employers. College staff work closely with SDS and DYW colleagues to promote the ambitions of DYW and the apprenticeship routes available to learners. They have developed bespoke promotional material, which includes case studies of Orkney learners, and these have been distributed widely to local schools and through social media.
- The college is promoting Foundation Apprenticeships (FA) effectively with parents and carers, who are key influencers with young people, to inform them better about the benefits of these qualifications. There has been an increase in the number of senior phase pupils undertaking FAs in the current year, from seven learners on one framework to 23 learners across four different frameworks.
- During the delivery of programmes, teaching staff continue to emphasise the importance to learners of developing relevant skills for employment. Staff have a good awareness of local labour market needs and incorporate relevant examples into learning activities. Curriculum teams have undertaken training with SDS on career management skills and the Career Education Standard, with further training planned on the use of My World of Work. The college now has a partnership agreement with SDS which includes fortnightly visits to the college by SDS Careers staff to provide personal careers support for learners.
- Curriculum teams have introduced learning activities into all full-time programmes which reflect the realities of the workplace and prepare learners better for employment. Many of these programmes contain a work placement or an opportunity for work experience. In part-time programmes, most learners are in employment and completing awards that support their current work practices.
- Most teaching staff participate routinely in activities that reflect on the relevance and currency of the programmes in their curriculum area. There are many examples of where the curriculum or delivery methods have been improved to meet the needs of learners. For example, in hospitality both the curriculum content and delivery model have been revised following a self-reflection exercise. This new approach has improved the recruitment of learners and retention rates. Teaching staff who attended Practice and Pedagogy sessions, held in the last academic year, found these helpful in reflecting more thoroughly on their own teaching practice. The college has also arranged staff workshops to facilitate reflective practice in line with the General Teaching Council for Scotland professional standards.
- At present, the college operates a voluntary peer observation process in which some staff participate. They report that the process is useful in helping them reflect on their teaching practice. The UHI has recently introduced guidance for a peer observation process across the partnership. The college has used this guidance to develop a revised peer observation model which is specific to the context and requirements of Orkney College UHI. This model is now in its final stages of development ahead of approval by the college management team, and will be piloted later this academic year.

- The college continues to raise learner awareness of the support available to those experiencing mental health issues and is in the process of appointing a college-based Mental Health Counsellor. College staff are aware of the various pathways which they can signpost to learners who may require services to support their mental health. College staff have worked well, in partnership with Highlands and Islands Students' Association (HISA), to promote these services. A group of staff, including the HISA depute president, have undertaken the Mental Health First Aid training programme. Participants report that they have benefited from the insights gained from this activity, which they value highly. Staff also have access to an online, UHI-wide mental health toolkit. This resource is proving helpful for staff who require practical information about how to identify behaviours that might indicate a potential mental health issue.
- The college is incrementally increasing the range and levels of its engineering programmes. The engineering curriculum team has introduced a new National 5 Skills for Work (SfW) programme in engineering based on demand from local employers, which attracted 28 learners. The college has also introduced a National Certificate mechanical engineering programme and appointed a new engineering lecturer. The curriculum team has developed and introduced new, bespoke programmes for the transportation of hydrogen fuel. However, skills based courses such as SVQs, FAs and MAs have not been added to the engineering portfolio, primarily due to the shortage of work placements for learners.

Areas of further progress and actions required

- Although work placements support learners on many programmes, most teaching staff are not aware of, or using, the Work Placement Standard.
- Due to staff absence, no Practice and Pedagogy sessions have been held in the current academic year. The college plans to re-commence these sessions when a new post-holder is appointed.
- There are no progression routes available for learners completing the SfW National 5 engineering programme this summer. This should be addressed as a matter of urgency to meet the needs of these learners, and to support the college's commitment to increasing participation in engineering and STEM programmes.

Leadership and quality culture

Areas of positive progress

- College managers are working productively to overcome the challenges faced by young people who require residential accommodation when they begin a programme of study at the college. Finding suitable accommodation for young people under the age of 18 is constrained by legislative obligations, such as safeguarding and child protection regulations. Previously, the college has been unsuccessful in a number of attempts to resolve this issue with schools and local businesses. For college learners over the age of 18, recent conversations with the Student Housing Cooperative have been very productive. The cooperative is keen to discuss solutions with the college in partnership with UHI and OIC to help provide appropriate accommodation.

- Two HISA student representatives are now voting members of the College Management Committee and have received appropriate training to carry out their role. These representatives are contributing effectively to the work and purpose of this committee.
- The principal has established a new senior team structure that clarifies roles and responsibilities, including those for Curriculum Leaders. This has improved communication and created a more open culture for sharing information across college functions. The senior team has increased its engagement with OIC, SDS, third sector organisations and the UHI partnership. However, the unexpected absence of senior management capacity has impeded some organisational developments in recent months.
- The new chair of the College Management Committee (CMC) has initiated an independent review of management and governance in the college. Recent improvements to the role of the CMC in college effectiveness and scrutiny are beginning to have an impact. For example, proposals for new developments are now based on the submission of a business case to the CMC, providing a more robust, documented and systematic approach to development planning.
- The principal and principal designate have organised appropriate activities to support senior staff and college managers during the handover of roles. The new Quality Manager is working effectively with the principal and senior team to relieve the principal of these temporary duties. A new Students Record Manager and Business and Finance Manager have recently been appointed.

Areas of further progress and actions required

- None

What happens next?

The progress visit report will be shared with SFC, the college board (and in multi-college regions, the Regional Strategic Body). The outcomes of the PV will inform a refreshed EREP (2020-23) due to be submitted by all colleges in October 2020.

Ian P Beach
HM Inspector