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# Regional Board Report

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| **Subject:** Education Scotland; Annual Engagement Visit Report. | **Purpose:**<br>**For Approval** ☒<br>**For Discussion** ☒<br>**For Information** ☒ |
| **Prepared by:** Lynne M Gilchrist | **Date of Committee:** Thursday 9th March 2023 |

**Purpose:** To inform the Regional Board of Management the outcomes within the Education Scotland Annual Engagement Visit report.

**Executive Summary:**

HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited Borders College in November 2022 to undertake an Annual Engagement Visit. During the visit, the Education Scotland review team talked to learners, staff and stakeholders, and worked closely with the senior managers within the college.

**Key items:**

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

Recruitment
Retention
Attainment
Progression

**The following areas for improvement were identified and will be/ have been actioned by teams:**

A few learners who had joined programmes after the start date did not receive a formal induction and as a result were not fully prepared for their programmes of study.

Learners at the Tweedbank campus report feeling isolated from the main college and less well provided for than their peers. In addition, learners do not have access to the same support or services as other learners.

Class representatives have not received training to help them fulfil their role and this is impacting on their ability to fully represent the learner voice across a number of areas.

The Student Association (SA) vice president roles had not yet been filled and as a result the SA is under-resourced.

There are currently no formal, consistent arrangements in place to allow learners to provide feedback about their experiences and support action planning for improvement.

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| **The following main point for action was identified:**<br>College managers should ensure that all learners have regular opportunities to provide their views and contribute to action-planning for improvement.<br><br>**Questions that Members should ask themselves when reading the paper:** | |
| **Linked to Strategic Ambition(s):**<br>**Create high quality learning and training opportunities which are relevant, enabling and flexible**<br><br>Take a leading role in enabling an inclusive, resilient and sustainable Scotland<br><br>**Performance Measures:**<br>Student Outcomes in top quartile of national colleges<br><br>Engaged & empowered staff and student body | |
| **Linked to Strategic Risk Register:**<br>1c - Learners Needs<br><br>4b - Governance | |
| **Recommendation:**<br>Board of Management approval of this report is sought and to publish the report and share with all stakeholders. | |
| **Previous Committee Approvals:** | |
| **For publication** ☒ | **Not for publication** ☐<br>**If not, why not?** |

28 February 2023

Mr Pete Smith
Principal and Chief Executive
Borders College

Dear Mr Smith,

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited Borders College in November 2022 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**

College managers revised their approach to the marketing of provision in order to raise the profile of the college in the local area. This was supported by use of Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) and regional skills data to help identify and promote local career pathways to schools, parents and care-givers and Skills Development Scotland careers staff. College staff take good account of local, national and regional priorities to inform the recent curriculum redesign. The revised curriculum has impacted positively on recruitment, meets better the needs of potential learners, and has increased the number of male applicants for courses. As a result of learner feedback and the implementation of the recent Future Skills Strategy, staff introduced a series of information events to ensure potential learners remained engaged with the college. This is showing early signs of having a positive impact on rates of early learner withdrawal.

**Retention**

Overall, rates of learner withdrawal are lower than the sector average for both further and higher education (FE and HE) programmes. Achievement Coaches support learners well in classes and have a positive relationship with all curriculum staff. This cohesive, cross-college approach to providing support is impacting positively on the learner experience and outcomes. Staff in curriculum areas have redesigned their programmes to include a range of National Progression Awards (NPAs), employability awards and work placements to motivate learners to continue on their programmes. The 'Ask Me Anything' meetings for staff helped to identify the need to provide professional learning on dealing with challenging behaviours. This was recorded and uploaded onto the e-learning site for all staff to access when needed. The innovative 'quiet induction' arrangements provide support for learners who are unable to attend the scheduled induction for their programme. Although uptake was high, it is too early to determine if this has impacted positively on learner retention. The evaluation of learner support services highlighted the need for an increasing number of young males accessing services. This resulted in targeted support and interventions for male learners across the college including the "Andy's Man Club" and the men's walking group.


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## Attainment

Full time FE learner attainment was high at 70% an increase of three percentage points from the previous year. Part time FE attainment was also high at 85%, an increase of two percentage points from the previous year. Full time HE learner attainment was high at 76%, an increase of three percentage points from the previous year. Part-time HE learner attainment was high at 89%, an increase of two percentage points from the previous year. All of these figures continue to be above the sector average. Improved access to information and data has helped staff to target support for learners who are experiencing hardship, and address student behaviour issues.

## Progression

Learner progression to a positive destination from full-time HE programmes has increased over the last 3 years. Of the HE learners moving on to further study, almost all progressed to a course relating to their college programme. The response rate to the SFC leavers destination survey for full-time FE learners was high (91%). Most learners go on to study another programme at Borders College although the percentage of learners moving into further full-time study has declined. College staff have established a number of partnerships with a wide range of employers, schools, and universities to provide progression opportunities for learners. Staff identified a need to raise learner awareness of potential positive destinations out with their local area. As a result they have introduced the global citizenship programme across the college. This supports learners well to identify opportunities for progression they may not previously have considered.

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

- A few learners who had joined programmes after the start date did not receive a formal induction and as a result were not fully prepared for their programmes of study.
- Learners at the Tweedbank campus report feeling isolated from the main college and less well provided for than their peers. In addition, learners do not have access to the same support or services as other learners.
- Class representatives have not received training to help them fulfil their role and this is impacting on their ability to fully represent the learner voice across a number of areas.
- The Student Association (SA) vice president roles had not yet been filled and as a result the SA is under-resourced.
- There are currently no formal, consistent arrangements in place to allow learners to provide feedback about their experiences and support action planning for improvement.


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The following main point for action was identified:

- College managers should ensure that all learners have regular opportunities to provide their views and contribute to action-planning for improvement.

## What happens next?

Whilst we recognise the progress has been made across most areas for improvement, we will ask for a report on progress on the agreed areas for improvement to be provided to the college link HM Inspector within agreed timescales. Taking account of the progress report, we will then decide what further engagement with the college is required.

Margaret Rose Livingstone
HM Inspector


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Education Scotland
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# Annual Engagement Visit Report

## Borders College

## 21 February 2023

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| **College Principal** | **Peter Smith** |
| **Annual Engagement Visit Date** | **17 November 2022** |
| **College Nominee** | **Lynne Gilchrist** |
| **Lead Inspector** | **Margaret Rose Livingstone** |

## 1. Background

Annual Engagement Visits (AEVs) are planned collaboratively between the college, HM Inspectors and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

During the AEV, a team of HM Inspectors evaluated progress made by the college towards improvement priorities and outcomes of previous engagement with HM Inspectors. During the visit, the team met with staff, learners and other stakeholders and explored the following overarching themes linked to the college's enhancement plan and priorities around COVID-19 recovery: learner recruitment; retention; attainment; and progression.

This report outlines the findings from the visit in terms of: areas of positive progress; areas for development, 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.

## 2. The college and its context

Borders College operates in single college region in the Scottish Borders. The college has four main campuses located in Galashiels, Hawick, Newtown St Boswells and Tweedbank. Each year around 5,000 learners enrol on a range of programmes, from introductory level to advanced provision at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 8 and beyond, including Modern and Foundation Apprenticeships. The college also provides a large number of industry based training courses for businesses throughout Scotland. Partnerships have been developed with a number of Scottish universities to provide learners with progression to degree level programmes, often with advanced standing. The college delivers 26,546 credits of activity each year as part of its Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

The college Executive Team has undergone significant change over the last year with new appointments to the roles of Principal & CEO, Vice Principal – Student Experience and Vice Principal - Finance and Corporate Services. Additionally, the Assistant Principal – Curriculum assumed responsibility for Quality in September 2022.

The performance indicators used throughout this report are from the SFC published data for AY2020/2021.


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# 3. Summary of findings

## 3.1 Recruitment

### Areas of positive progress

### Learner progress and outcomes

- College managers revised their approach to the marketing of provision in order to raise the profile of the college in the local area. This was supported by use of Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) and regional skills data to help identify and promote local career pathways to schools, parents and care-givers and Skills Development Scotland careers staff.

### Curriculum, learning, teaching, and assessment

- College staff take good account of local, national and regional priorities to inform the recent curriculum redesign. The revised curriculum has impacted positively on recruitment, meets better the needs of potential learners, and has increased the number of male applicants for courses.

- Recently introduced pathfinder programmes in the land-based and digital subject areas are widening the opportunities for learners at access level.

### Services to support learning

- The Services to Support Learning team review all course application forms to identify learners who have disclosed a need for support. Following this, the team update the college risk register and contact learners to provide information and support and to facilitate the recruitment process. This includes sessions to help keep learners engaged with the college and prior to enrolment and improve conversion rates from application.

### Learner engagement

- College staff gathered learner views to support evaluation of learners' experience of the recruitment process. Learners reported that overall, they were satisfied with application and enrolment approaches, engagement of staff with them and the support and information they received.

### Evaluation to facilitate improvement

- As a result of learner feedback and the implementation of the recent Future Skills Strategy, staff introduced a series of information events to ensure potential learners remained engaged with the college. This is showing early signs of having a positive impact on rates of early learner withdrawal.



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**Areas for development**

- A few learners who had joined programmes after the start date did not receive a formal induction and as a result were not fully prepared for their programmes of study.

## 3.2 Retention

**Areas of positive progress**

**Learner progress and outcomes**

- Overall, rates of learner withdrawal are lower than the sector average for both further and higher education (FE and HE) programmes. There has been an increase in the full-time FE rate of withdrawal of two percentage points, however this remains four percentage points below the sector average.

- Achievement Coaches support learners well in classes and have a positive relationship with all curriculum staff. This cohesive, cross-college approach to providing support is impacting positively on the learner experience and outcomes.

**Curriculum, learning, teaching, and assessment**

- Staff in curriculum areas have redesigned their programmes to include a range of National Progression Awards (NPAs), employability awards and work placements to motivate learners to continue on their programmes.

- Achievement Coaches monitor learner progress and attendance through weekly meetings with curriculum staff. This has resulted in changes to delivery and assessment approaches in some areas to support learner engagement and motivation.

- The implementation of the Future Skills strategy across the college by staff is encouraging learners to reflect on the range of skills they are developing within their programmes. This is supporting learners well to engage with their courses, identify areas of development, and consider environmental, social and economic sustainability as part of their learning.

- The ‘Ask Me Anything’ meetings for staff helped to identify the need to provide professional learning on dealing with challenging behaviours. This was recorded and uploaded onto the e-learning site for all staff to access when needed.

**Services to support learning**

- The innovative ‘quiet induction’ arrangements provide support for learners who are unable to attend the scheduled induction for their programme. Although uptake was high, it is too early to determine if this has impacted positively on learner retention.

- Staff are aware of the increasing number of learners presenting with support needs. Accordingly, the college has increased capacity within busy campuses where learners can access safe, quiet, spaces to work alone or with support staff.


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- Services to Support Learning staff deliver comprehensive resilience training to students in most curriculum teams to help students to stay on their programmes. This is well received with the impact on retention being evaluated throughout the current academic year.

**Learner engagement**

- Almost all learners speak positively about the resilience programme delivered during induction. Overall learners were very satisfied with their induction to college programmes.

- Learners who use the college e-learning platform receive good feedback on their learning from staff. The learning materials are easily accessible and support learners to study at a pace or place that suits their needs.

- There are good examples of learners leading learning, particularly where they are progressing within college to more advanced programmes. Towards the end of their programme, learners are involved in decisions about curriculum design for the following year, which is engaging them well and helps motivate them to progress.

- Learners in a few programmes help to raise awareness about mental health support services for men. For example, they hold several successful sports events including a football tournament and there are plans to include this as part of the curriculum in future.

**Evaluation to facilitate improvement**

- College managers had invested in significant system improvements to provide staff with access to information through easily accessible dashboards. This is supporting curriculum teams to monitor and evaluate the performance of learners on programmes. Staff analyse and use the data well to identify student absence patterns and to provide early interventions such as support for learners with mental health challenges.

- The evaluation of learner support services highlighted the need for an increasing number of young males accessing services. This resulted in targeted support and interventions for male leaners across the college including the “Andy’s Man Club” and the men’s walking group.

**Areas for development**

- Learners at the Tweedbank campus report feeling isolated from the main college and less well provided for than their peers. The canteen area is poorly resourced, and learners are unable to store or purchase food on campus. In addition, learners do not have access to the same support or services as other learners.

- Class representatives have not received training to help them fulfil their role and this is impacting on their ability to fully represent the learner voice across a number of areas.

- The Student Association (SA) vice president roles had not yet been filled and as a result the SA is under-resourced.

## 3.3 Attainment



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## Areas of positive progress

### Learner progress and outcomes

- Full time FE learner attainment is high at 70%, an increase of three percentage points from the previous year. This continues to be above the sector average.
- Part-time FE learner attainment is high at 85%, an increase of two percentage points from the previous year. This continues to be above the sector average
- Full-time HE learner attainment is high at 76%, an increase of three percentage points from the previous year. This continues to be above the sector average.
- Part-time HE learner attainment is high at 89%, an increase of two percentage points from the previous year. This continues to be above the sector average.

### Curriculum, learning, teaching, and assessment

- Staff have redesigned the college curriculum to include a greater focus on learner transition at entry and exit points. This is helping to support high levels of learner attainment.
- Almost all teaching staff make effective use of the college e-learning platform to schedule assessments carefully and ensure learners are not over-burdened or have conflicting deadlines.
- In a few curriculum areas, weekly tracking and monitoring by teaching staff and achievement coaches facilitates early intervention that support learners well to achieve and make progress in their learning.

### Services to support learning

- Services to support learning staff update the risk register on an ongoing basis and provide effective signposting at their monthly meeting with Curriculum Learning Managers. This is helping to ensure that learners receive the support they need.

### Learner engagement

- Almost all learners are satisfied with both their preparation for assessment and the feedback they receive on their progress. Staff use a variety of constructive feedback methods to support learning.
- Almost all learners are aware of the services available to support them at college.
- Staff had good relationships and communicate effectively with employers regarding learners on apprenticeship programmes to provide regular feedback on learner progress.


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**Evaluation to facilitate improvement**

- College managers have engaged in professional learning on inclusive leadership to support them to take ownership of curriculum planning and its impact on learners.

- Improved access to information and data has helped staff to target support for learners who are experiencing hardship, and address student behaviour issues.

**Areas for development**

- There are currently no formal, consistent arrangements in place to allow learners to provide feedback about their experiences and support action planning for improvement.

## 3.4 Progression

**Areas of positive progress**

**Learner progress and outcomes**

- Learner progression to a positive destination from full-time HE programmes has increased over the last 3 years. Of the HE learners moving on to further study, almost all progressed to a course relating to their college programme.

- The response rate to the SFC leavers destination survey for full-time FE learners was high (91%). Most learners go on to study another programme at Borders College although the percentage of learners moving into further full-time study has declined.

- Curriculum staff use the e-learning platform well to inform learners of their progress in real time. This is enabling learners to manage their learning and to set targets for achievement.

**Curriculum, learning, teaching, and assessment**

- College staff have established a number of partnerships with a wide range of employers, schools, and universities to provide progression opportunities for learners.

- Staff use The Future Skills Strategy effectively to provide learners with a range of skills to support their learning beyond college. This is supporting learners to develop the skills the need for the next phase of their learning or employment.

**Services to support learning**

- Staff provide a high level of support to learners who are making applications for employment or to further study at university and help them plan successfully for their next step.



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**Learner engagement**

- Learners receive helpful information regarding industry links and how to progress to further study. They are encouraged to attend open days at universities and well as employer industry events to help them make informed choices.

**Evaluation to facilitate improvement**

- Staff identified a need to support raise learner awareness of potential positive destinations out with their local area. As a result they have introduced the global citizenship programme across the college. This supports learners well to identify opportunities for progression they may not previously have considered.

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

**Areas for development**

- None identified.

## 4. Main Points for Action

- College managers should ensure that all learners have regular opportunities to provide their views and contribute to action-planning for improvement.

## 5. What happens next?

We recognise the progress made against almost all aspects for improvement, however further progress is required in a number of areas. We will require a report on progress on the agreed areas for improvement to be provided to the college link HM Inspector within agreed timescales. Taking account of the progress report, we will then decide what further engagement with the college is required.

**Margaret Rose Livingstone**
**HM Inspector**



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