

GLASGOW KELVIN COLLEGE**Learning and Teaching Committee – 26 February 2025****Education Scotland Glasgow Thematic Report: Improving Outcomes for Learners****Report by Vice Principal Curriculum****1. Introduction**

In academic year 2023-24, Education Scotland undertook inspection review visits across all three Glasgow colleges as part of a thematic review of student outcome rates within the region. In December 2025, the attached final thematic report was published.

2. Glasgow Thematic Report: Improving Outcomes for Learners

During the thematic review, a team of HM Inspectors, associate assessors and student team members explored aspects of equity, attainment, and achievement for learners across the Glasgow College Region. This included discussions with staff and students at each of the three Glasgow colleges.

The attached report highlights challenges impacting student success, including financial pressures, the COVID-19 pandemic, and staff strikes. Recommendations focus on strengthening collaboration, improving underperforming programs, and developing essential skills for future workforce needs. The areas identified for improvement have been integrated into College operational planning and quality enhancement activity.

3. Impact on Students

The areas of improvement identified by Education Scotland are intended to improve services and outcomes for learners.

4. Resource Implications

There are no resource implications arising directly from this report.

5. Equalities

There are no equality implications arising directly from this report.

6. Risk and Assurance

This report provides assurance that the College is considering recommendations for improvement actions identified by Education Scotland.

7. Data Protection

There are no data protection implications arising directly from this report.

8. Recommendations

Members are recommended to:

- i. Note the attached Education Scotland Glasgow Thematic Report: Improving Outcomes for Learners Annual Engagement Report.

9. Further Information

Members can obtain additional information on the contents of this report from Robin Ashton, Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality Enhancement (rashton@glasgowkelvin.ac.uk).

Glasgow Kelvin College
RA
27/01/25

Thematic Review: Improving outcomes for learners

Glasgow College Region

10 December 2024

1. Background

HM Inspectors undertake thematic reviews to support improvement in aspects of the college sector. The footprint of each thematic review is adjusted to take account of scale and reach of institutions. Thematic reviews support evaluation of approaches and impact, providing depth of intelligence about the individual organisations involved, along with information to inform capacity building and future approaches to improvement and enhancement.

During this thematic review, a team of HM Inspectors, associate assessors and student team members explored aspects of equity, attainment, and achievement for learners across the Glasgow College Region. The region comprises three assigned colleges; City of Glasgow College; Glasgow Clyde College; and Glasgow Kelvin College. During the review, the team talked to learners, staff, and stakeholders to consider how well the region and its colleges supports successful learner outcomes.

2. The region and its context

Labour and skills

The mid to long-term drivers for the labour market and skills needs of the Glasgow College Region have been influenced by recent high inflation and subdued growth. Future education and training requirements are likely to include upskilling and reskilling across almost all employment sectors. By 2032, there will be a need to replace around 223,000 people who have left the labour market in the region. Overall, the Glasgow region faces ongoing challenges such as high inactivity rates and long-term sickness. However, over time the region has remained resilient, with broadly the same rates of employment and unemployment as the rest of Scotland.

Qualifications and education provision

The most recent census data available shows that 20% of people in the Glasgow region have a degree or equivalent qualification. Over the next ten years, the region will experience a high demand for workers, and specifically for those with qualifications from levels 7 to 10 on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). According to the Annual Population Survey 2020/21, 13.5% of the population aged 16 to 64 years old in Glasgow City had low, or no qualifications (SCQF level 4 or below).

3. The Glasgow college region

The Glasgow College Region is currently overseen by the Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board (GCRB), as the regional strategic body for the three assigned colleges. In 2023, GCRB refreshed its regional strategy for college learning with a new strategic plan¹ to reflect the significant changes in the sector and society. This strategic plan is underpinned by priorities relating to a Glasgow college curriculum for meeting the skills needs of the city region through collaboration and removal of inappropriate competition. However, it is not clear how GCRB's approach to governance and oversight of curriculum and quality supports it to realise the ambitions set out in its strategic plan. That is, to offer a full regional curriculum to all learners, offering a coherent and consistent student experience, and advancing and offering access to a regionally integrated curriculum.

¹ <https://www.gcrb.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/GCRB-Regional-Strategic-Plan24.pdf>

The three assigned colleges

City of Glasgow College is the largest of Scotland's colleges. The college has two campuses in Glasgow city centre: City Campus on Cathedral St in Glasgow's Learning Quarter and the Riverside Campus on the South bank of the River Clyde. The college provides a range of full-time (FT) and part-time (PT) education and training programmes at levels 2 to 10 on the SCQF.

Glasgow Clyde College is another of Scotland's largest further education providers. The college has three campuses; Anniesland, Cardonald and Langside, and provides a range of FT and PT education and training programmes at levels 2 to 9 on the SCQF.

Glasgow Kelvin College operates from three main campuses in Easterhouse, Haghill, and Springburn. The college offers a curriculum designed to meet the social and economic needs of its local communities. It provides a range of FT and PT education and training programmes at levels 2 to 8 on the SCQF.

4. External Factors

In recent years, the delivery of skills and qualifications across the college sector and in this region has been affected by a range of external factors which have impacted negatively on learner success and withdrawal rates.

Recruitment challenges between colleges, universities, and industry

A reducing 16 to 24-year-old learner population pool increased competition between universities and colleges for enrolments and for employers recruiting to fill vacancies in the job market. This competition was further compounded by the impact of Brexit and the approximate 10% reduction of people from other European countries taking up employment in Scotland. The overall number of learners studying higher education qualifications has reduced over the past few years and colleges have adjusted accordingly. This has also increased competition between universities and colleges, with many college learners leaving their programme before completing their college studies to accept a university place.

The Covid-19 pandemic

Covid-19 had a further major impact on how colleges deliver their curriculum portfolio, in particular restrictions on face-to-face delivery. The Glasgow College Region experienced more frequent and longer periods of lockdown during the pandemic than other college regions. This severely affected their ability to deliver practical skills training, and many learners left their programmes early as a result. Colleges are only just beginning to recover from the effects on learner attendance and lost learning during the pandemic. Since the pandemic, colleges have experienced a sharp increase in young people presenting with additional needs and multiple complex needs, increasing the demand for support needs provided by colleges. Additionally, many young people attending college since the pandemic have a deficit in the knowledge and skills required to attend post-school education. Colleges are providing additional learning hours and wrap-around support arrangements to help these learners sustain their studies and achieve. However, many leave their programmes early or achieve only partial success and reduce overall learner attainment.

Financial influences

The cost-of-living crisis has increased the need for learners to find part-time work while studying at college. Learners are often faced with a choice of sustaining an income or leaving college early. This has contributed to an increase in learner withdrawal from college programmes, again leading to an overall reduction in learner attainment. College leaders find overall financial operating conditions challenging due to annual budget constraints. They have been gradually reshaping their curriculum portfolio and staffing levels to manage their finances. This has resulted in pressure on college managers to maintain appropriate levels of teaching hours and continue to support essential services for learners.

Industrial action

Ongoing college sector industrial action lasting for almost a decade has impacted on learner data collection and reporting on institutional performance. Lost teaching time due to strike action has been almost impossible to replace. The Glasgow college region has had a higher rate of participation by teaching staff in industrial action, in comparison with other college regions. This has influenced and negatively impacted learner attendance, with many learners choosing to leave college.

5. Summary of findings

5.1 Leadership and planning for the delivery of high-quality learning provision

Across the region, the senior leadership teams of all three colleges have restructured curriculum areas to provide better alignment with regional economic and industry needs. In each of the three colleges, most curriculum managers take good account of feedback from employers and industry bodies to plan a curriculum that meets the identified needs of their learners. Senior leaders plan routinely with their peers in the other colleges to meet the needs of learners and stakeholders across the Glasgow region. At curriculum team level, this strategic collaboration is not widely understood. Some curriculum teams meet informally with colleagues from the other colleges in the region to discuss operational performance and share effective practice. This happens on an informal basis and is not widespread in all subject areas.

Within each college, curriculum managers encourage and enable staff to evaluate programme performance against regional and sectoral performance levels. Most curriculum teams share emerging effective practice within their respective colleges to enhance approaches to learning and teaching. Strategies for improving learning and teaching are developed by individual colleges, subject areas, or faculties. There are opportunities to build on the individual strengths of each college and encourage sharing of highly effective practice across all three colleges to support improvement in learner outcomes.

Approaches to communication and collaboration for self-evaluation

In all three colleges, college managers use information dashboards effectively to support staff in the analysis of performance data to drive improvement. Each college has programmes that demonstrate strong performance. Individually, they take action when required to improve outcomes for learners on poorly performing programmes.

Overall, managers use data analysis well to inform targeted interventions that tailor support for individual learners. Almost all college staff engage actively in quality arrangements to bring

about improvements to learning and teaching. All three colleges use digital information platforms effectively to provide curriculum teams with comprehensive performance data. Curriculum staff use this data well to identify actions to improve programme delivery and performance. However, most managers acknowledge that there is a need for staff to receive further training on the use of this technology.

College managers use staff fora effectively to improve and enhance curriculum design. There are good examples of curriculum teams in each college sharing best practice, such as the development of learning and teaching resources using artificial intelligence. All college managers tailor professional learning activities to the specific roles and responsibilities of staff, with a focus on meeting the diverse range of learner needs. Staff appraisal arrangements encourage staff to reflect on future training requirements and identify activities that complement the strategic direction of each college. This has resulted in an increase in digital upskilling, neurodiversity training, and awareness of trauma informed practice.

Involvement of staff, learners, and stakeholders in developing learning and teaching

Curriculum staff take good account of feedback from employers, together with regional and national skills data, to tailor programmes to meet industry needs. They use this information effectively to develop new programmes that enhance the learning experience and prepare learners well for the workplace.

Most curriculum managers share learner feedback regularly with college staff. Feedback in individual curriculum areas is collated and communicated well to individual teams to support them in planning for improvement. When actions are taken, most curriculum teams provide an update for class representatives and learners to show how their feedback has helped to improve the learning experience. Students' associations (SAs) engage proactively within their respective colleges. They are also effective participants in college and GCRB board meetings.

5.2 Evaluation leading to improvement

Management of the evaluation of provision and services

A few college managers work informally with their regional college partners to exchange ideas and share experiences, with the aim of improving outcomes and support services for learners. College managers respond well to issues raised by staff during evaluation meetings and these discussions lead to improvement actions. Overall, staff feel empowered to make improvements to programmes based on feedback from learners. Almost all curriculum managers use a red, amber, and green (RAG) system to evaluate the viability of programmes across the curriculum offer. The RAG system helps managers to analyse a range of factors such as application rates, conversion rates from offer to enrolment, learner withdrawals, and unit outcome performance. This informs decision-making for improving programme content and identifies unviable programmes.

Evaluation to improve outcomes for learners

Most curriculum teams work together effectively within their colleges to evaluate the performance of programmes. They use college self-evaluation arrangements confidently to identify key tasks to support effective curriculum planning and delivery. Curriculum teams develop annually, targeted action plans to enhance learner outcomes. The three college SA presidents from each assigned college are planning to work collaboratively in 2024 to examine student mental health, help identify potential barriers to applying for college and improve their support for learners.

Approaches to strategic partnership working for improvement

Curriculum managers in all three colleges have established well-considered articulation arrangements with a broad range of universities. Many learners transition to degree programmes both within Glasgow and externally to the region from a variety of curriculum areas. All three colleges have strong regional strategic partnerships with agencies such as the National Health Service (NHS) and Glasgow Health and Social Care. These partnerships are valuable in shaping the curriculum and delivery models for learners to provide clear pathways to employment. Overall, college partners within and from outside the region, support the Glasgow regional skills agenda well. Most curriculum staff are not sufficiently aware of the Skills Development Scotland (SDS) Regional Skills Assessment (RSA) for Glasgow. This is a missed opportunity to provide staff with intelligence to support planning a curriculum that meets the needs of the Glasgow region. In particular, the development of a curriculum that effectively addresses the skill gaps and requirements of the local workforce. College leaders plan the provision of school college partnerships collaboratively to ensure the needs of the region's schools are met.

5.3 Learner retention, attainment, and progression

This section provides an overview of learner retention, attainment, and progression for the three assigned colleges. It includes trend data for the three years up to academic year (AY) 2021-22, and updated data for AY 2022-23. As set out previously, learner success and withdrawal rates have been impacted by a number of external factors.

Further Education (FE)

The overall rate of successful completion for learners across the Glasgow region on full-time FE programmes declined by 16% over the last three years and was low (53.8%) in AY 2021-2022. This is 5% lower than national performance levels. The rate for full-time FE learners completing their programme with partial success in 2021-2022 increased by over 3% to 14.5% from the previous year. This is almost 3% higher than national performance levels. The rate of learner withdrawal from full-time FE programmes across the Glasgow region was 31.7% in 2021-2022. This is higher than the sector average and has increased compared with the previous year.

The successful completion rate for learners across the region on part-time FE programmes declined by 7.6% over the last three years and is 74.9% in 2021-2022. This is 1.4% lower than national performance levels. The completion rate for part-time FE learners completing their programmes with partial success in 2021-2022 increased by 1.6% compared to the previous year. This is below the national performance level. The rate of learner withdrawal for part-time FE programmes was 12.4% in 2021-2022. This is 1.7% higher than the sector, and an increase compared with the previous year.

Higher Education (HE)

The successful completion rate for learners across the Glasgow region on full-time HE programmes declined by 15% over the last three years and was 61.2% in AY 2021-2022. This was lower than national performance levels. The rate for full-time HE learners completing their programme with partial success in 2021-2022 increased 6.4% from the previous year and is higher than national performance levels. The rate of learner withdrawal for full-time HE programmes was 23.5% in 2021-2022. This is an increase compared with the previous year and is in line with national performance levels.

The successful completion rate for learners across the Glasgow region on part-time HE programmes declined over the last three years and is lower than national performance levels. The rate for part-time HE learners completing their programme with partial success in 2021-2022 increased 2.1% to 10.7% from the previous year and is lower than national performance levels. The rate of learner withdrawal for part-time HE programmes was 12.9% in 2021-2022. This is 3.4% higher than national performance levels and is unchanged from the previous year.

Key Groups of Learners

The successful completion, partial success, and withdrawal rates for learners from the most deprived backgrounds across the Glasgow region are all within 1% of national performance levels for AY 2021-22. For learners from an ethnic minority background, successful completion rates are 2.7% higher in the Glasgow region compared with national performance levels. These learners had lower rates of partial success and withdrawal compared with the rest of Scotland.

Successful completion rates for learners who declare a disability in the Glasgow region in AY 2021-22 were lower than national performance levels. These learners had slightly higher rates of withdrawal and partial success.

For care experienced learners, successful completion rates were 2% below national performance levels and are significantly lower than the success rate of learners in the wider Glasgow college region.

Updated performance data for 2022-23

During the period of the thematic review, SFC published performance data for AY 2022-23. This data indicates that the overall rate of successful completion for learners on full-time programmes improved in all three colleges across the region. The rate of learner withdrawal for full-time programmes also decreased in all three colleges during AY 2022-23. However, for part-time programmes there were variations across the three colleges with some improvement to overall learner success and withdrawal rates across the region.

Whilst learner outcomes are showing signs of improvement across the region, the new performance data confirms that with the exception of full-time HE programmes in one college, overall rates of successful completion for learners in all three colleges continue to be below national performance levels. Continued low levels of learner attainment in the Glasgow region will hamper efforts to meet the high demand for skilled workers, and for workers with qualifications at SCQF levels 7-10.

5.4 Equity, attainment, and achievement for all learners

Recruitment and retention

During the period between application and enrolment, staff in all three colleges provide good opportunities to introduce learners to the college environment. New learners are invited to meet their peers and staff prior to starting their programme and to tour college facilities. This is helping learners to gain confidence. All three colleges have revised their admissions arrangements to better support learner retention and attainment. These arrangements include attendance at pre-entry enrolment and induction sessions, and a good range of keep warm activities. Improvements to recruitment arrangements are helping to ensure learners are enrolled on an appropriate programme at the right level for them. Applicants who do not meet

entry criteria for their first choice of programme are offered alternative provision more suited to their qualifications and skill levels. During the early stage of programmes, almost all new learners can transfer to a more suitable level of programme should they need to.

Most curriculum managers make effective use of management information to monitor learner attendance, attainment, and progression. They use technology well to identify the challenges facing individual learners, such as financial hardship or homelessness. They draw productively on data to initiate actions that support learners to remain on their programme. Staff in all colleges have an increased focus on reducing the withdrawal rates of learners, particularly those on FE programmes, and have increased levels of support for learner wellbeing and welfare. Support staff work collaboratively with a wide range of external agencies to provide learners with direct access to specialist support services. Overall, these arrangements have the potential to improve learner retention and attainment rates across the region, although their impact has yet to be realised.

Most curriculum teams have re-designed their programmes to increase project-based learning and extend the opportunities for learners to develop and apply skills for learning, life, and work. This also reduces the assessment burden for learners. Learners are complimentary of this approach.

Development of skills

Most curriculum teams engage well in regional and national networks, such as Youth Enterprise Scotland and Glasgow City Council to provide learners with work placement opportunities. This engagement helps teaching staff to share highly effective practice and develop the curriculum to support learners with their employability skills.

In all three colleges, curriculum teams have introduced a good range of activities and interventions to support the development of essential and meta skills. College managers have created simulated workspaces and improved digital resources to enable learners to develop meta skills within a vocational context. Teaching staff have produced a good range of resources to help learners build skills for self-management, resilience, and employability. They use these resources effectively to support learners with their development of these skills. However, meta skills are not yet embedded in most learning and teaching sessions, and most curriculum teams have not yet contextualised, or embedded core skills within the vocational components of programmes. This limits the ability of learners to recognise, develop and promote these skills to potential employers.

Most curriculum teams make effective use of their links with industry to help learners understand better the world of work. They coordinate activities and events including presentations from industry representatives and former learners, field visits, and engagements with employers, to motivate learners and raise their aspirations. Staff use work placements well to help learners develop vocational skills. Curriculum staff encourage and support learners to accept work placement opportunities with business and industry partners. Many college programmes offer opportunities for learners to gain industry recognised certificates and vendor qualifications that are valued by employers and enhance the learning experience.

Ensuring equity of success and achievement for all learners

All colleges provide inclusive learning environments that take good account of the diverse range of learner needs. Learners access a good range of flexible support services and resources that

support their academic performance and wellbeing. These include facilities to borrow digital devices and access to adaptive learning technologies to accommodate individual support needs and learning preferences. During the period between application and enrolment, staff encourage and support learners to disclose any additional needs and enable arrangements and adaptations to be made prior to the start of programmes. However, staff in all colleges report an increase in the number of learners who disclose multi-complex needs after they have started their programme. This is impacting on the ability of staff to coordinate support in advance of programmes and delaying access to support services for learners.

All colleges have effective arrangements to support community-based English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) learners to progress to college programmes. Staff make good use of social media and host events that encourage and welcome learners from ethnic minority backgrounds into college. Some curriculum teams provide well-considered progression routes from community provision, such as ESOL and the Prince's Trust, to vocational programmes. These opportunities prepare learners well for progression to full-time college programmes.

Two colleges in the region have worked in partnership to set up community and youth hubs within Glasgow's most deprived areas. These hubs provide safe spaces for children, young people, and adults from the local community to take part in workshops that improve their digital, literacy and vocational skills, with a focus on health and wellbeing. ESOL support for speakers of other languages is also provided.

6. Governance, partnerships, and collaboration

The Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board

GCRB is currently responsible for the strategic planning of the regional curriculum and the allocation of up to £200 million of funding each year².

The Glasgow Colleges Group

The Glasgow Colleges Group (GCG) is a collaboration between the three Glasgow colleges and GCRB. This group has a committee structure that discusses pragmatic approaches to delivering the curriculum across the region; learning and teaching; sustainability; sharing best practice; and collaborating for funding bids.

Glasgow Economic Leadership (GEL)

Glasgow Economic Leadership (GEL) is the strategic leadership body for economic development across the Glasgow City Region. The GEL Board has a 'triple helix' membership that brings together senior leaders from academia, industry, and the public sector. It aligns private and public investment within the city region. The inclusive approach has eight sub-groups: GEL Finance & Business Services; GEL Life Sciences; GEL Tourism & Events; GEL Creative; GEL Sustainability /Net Zero; GEL Higher & Further Education; GEL Innovation; and, GEL International.

² <https://www.gcrb.ac.uk/>

7. Summary

The volume of provision within the Glasgow College Region accounts for approximately one fifth of all SFC funded college activity in Scotland. The three assigned colleges in the region work to strategically plan their curriculum to align with social and economic regional demands, with a focus on increasing collaboration between institutions. However, this is not sufficiently well understood at operational level. Data analysis and self-evaluation are used to inform improvement strategies, but this is not yet consistent and more professional learning for staff on the use of data to inform improvement is needed. The three colleges are working to address employability skills gaps, but the integration of meta skills within the curriculum remains inconsistent.

The region faces a number of current challenges in relation to learner success rates, retention, and the alignment of the curriculum and staff with regional economic needs. Key challenges for the region include the impact of Brexit, a high concentration of deprived areas, a declining 16-24-year-old population, and the cost-of-living crisis. Rates of learner retention are impacted by the need for many learners to manage part-time work alongside their studies. The colleges are all managing financial constraints, increased, and recurring industrial action by staff, and the aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic. These have hindered the delivery of practical skills and classes and contributed to increased learner withdrawal and consequently learner attainment.

For AY 2022/23, across all modes of study, learner success rates are below sector average in all three colleges (with the exception of one college for full-time HE provision). This is leading to rates of learner successful completion that are below sector average, and rates of partial success and withdrawal are higher than sector average for the region as a whole.

8. Next steps

The Glasgow College Region faces ongoing and long-term challenges to meet future education and training requirements across almost all employment sectors. By 2032, there will be a need to replace around 230,000 people who have left the labour market in the Glasgow region. To progress towards a regional workforce that is suitably skilled and qualified, the three Glasgow colleges will need to support the high demand for workers with qualifications at SCQF levels 7 to 10. Given the ongoing issues with rates of learner success, this will require improvement to equity, attainment, and achievement for learners across the Glasgow College Region. To support these improvements, the colleges in Glasgow should consider the following recommendations:

- refresh and reinvigorate the approach to collaboration and partnership working, building on existing individual and collective strengths, to support a high-performing regional curriculum that meets the current and future needs of all learners and stakeholders across Glasgow.
- take action to improve learner success rates on under-performing programmes.
- work to support learners' development of employability and meta skills identified by the Regional Skills Investment Plan to support the requirements of a trained workforce of the future.