

Argyll College UHI

Outcome Agreement Self-Evaluation Report – 2018/19

October 2019

Argyll College UHI operates from nine geographically dispersed centres within Argyll, the islands and Arran, increasing access to tertiary education and training for the people, businesses and communities in the rural south west corner of the highlands and islands region. In 2018/19 the college enrolled 169 full time FE students and 1568 part time FE students.

**Recruitment**

Argyll College UHI exceeded core credit target by 12%. In addition, for the first year, the college delivered ESIF credits (126). The overall credits delivered by the college were 7378, a 10% increase in the last 4 years and 6.4% of the overall regional credits delivered in 2018/19, indicating growth in FE delivery in Argyll.

The percentage of credits delivered to students in the 10% most deprived postcode areas reduced by half a percentage point to 3.5% (286).

Almost a third of credits were delivered to students with a known disability (30% -2252). This has added pressure to a small student services team, with additional resources being added to provide drop in sessions in two of the larger college centres to provide students with quicker and more easily accessible support. Students have been encouraged to access the on-line UHI counselling services, but uptake has been very low. UHI have recently appointed a mental health co-ordinator to provide support to local student services teams and provide strategic direction across the region.

The number of students enrolled and the proportion of credits delivered to students who have care experience has increased significantly from under 1% to 4%. Within our corporate parenting role students have been encouraged to declare any care experience to enable the college to provide early intervention and support, where needed and relevant. The number of full time students enrolled who have had care experience was low (6) with only 2 completing successfully, reflecting a poor success KPI (33%). Attendance patterns for students was poor and internally some of this has been attributed to the increased payment via the care experience bursary. College staff have actively engaged in the regional single policy working groups to devise a number of regionally agreed and implemented policies and procedures to support a number of areas, including student services.

There is close partnership working and good working relationships with the eleven local secondary schools to provide a wide range and depth of choice to school pupils, with 33% of the overall college credits being delivered to school pupils. The college has devised a school prospectus and is working closely with schools to enhance the delivery of the college provision. Within the region there is a collective approach being undertaken to enhance and add value to the curriculum offered to the senior phase to all schools across the region.

**Retention and Attainment**

63% of full time FE students successfully achieved a recognised qualification, the college’s lowest success KPI in the last four years and 14 percentage points lower than 2017/18. Early withdrawal increased by 4%, further withdrawal by 5% and partial success by 5%. There is a forensic diagnostic investigation into the reasons behind this disappointing reduction in full time student attainment. It’s important to recognise that with small cohort sizes one or two students can have a significant impact on percentage point differences. The reasons for this dip in full time retention and attainment is expected to be multi-faceted. Trends will be identified – by course, by teaching team, by location of students. Actions will be identified to address the increase in student withdrawal and the decrease in student attainment and will include, amongst other things, challenge meetings with teaching teams, reviewing course structures, reviewing teaching time allocated to units known to be challenging to students.

An attendance tracking system has been implemented from the start of 19/20 academic year, similar to the BRAG system used within other UHI partner colleges, where student attendance less than 75% is highlighted on a weekly basis to enable attendance interviews with students initially to identify reasons for the absence, agree support mechanisms that can be put in place for each student as well as any referral to external agencies that may be beneficial. All college centre staff and teaching staff have access to the data for students within their centre/course and all are encouraged to review the tracking on a weekly basis.

A proportion of further withdrawal is due to students leaving college at Easter for seasonal employment to meet the needs of local business. Discussions on the duration and timing of courses with teaching teams and local businesses will identify the best fit for local business need and ensure students have an opportunity to complete their course of study before leaving college and entering employment.

While partial success has increased significantly, for a number of these students this is, on a personal level, a positive outcome. With a significant increase in mental health issues identified within FE students, for many maintaining attendance until the end of the course was a significant achievement, rather than leaving and failing.

Part time FE retention and attainment has improved by 3 percentage points and is at the highest level for the last four years.

College staff are actively engaging in the regional strategy to identify trends and issues with retention and attainment across the region and agree and implement measures to improve retention and attainment regional wide as well as within curriculum areas and by individual partners seeking support for specific areas. As part of the strategy there is a proposal to deploy associate assessors from each partner, across the region to provide a ‘critical friend’ approach to quality enhancement, within a safe supportive environment.

**Progression**

From the 2017-18 leaver destination statistics 93.7% (119 headcount) of students were confirmed as having a positive outcome. Of these, 33% entered work which is 13 percentage points above the Scottish sector average. 60% progressed to further tertiary study, within many remaining within Argyll College and UHI. The focus on work placement activity within courses and developing student essential and meta skills, ensuring students have the skills required to enter the workplace, have helped to contribute to this success.

The UHI work based learning HUB (WBL HUB) continues to grow and develop across the partnership, facilitating the sharing of best practice and enabling the collaborative development of shared resources. Modern Apprenticeships are a growth area for the college, working in partnership with local employers, Skills Development Scotland and DYW Argyll. 14 MAs started in 2018/19 contract year with 30 starts predicted for 2019/20.

Foundation Apprenticeship numbers have been slow to start in Argyll with more promotion planned to enable pupils and parents to fully recognise the currency and validity of the qualifications. Through the collaborative practices of the WBL HUB a range of marketing and promotional material has been developed. In collaboration with one local secondary school 16 foundation apprenticeship students in Business started in May 2019.

From the 2018-19 Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey, 93% of FE students are satisfied overall with the college. This is a slight drop from the previous year but aligns with the overall Scottish sector satisfaction rates for 2018-19. Despite working extensively to encourage students to complete the survey there was a disappointing 58% response rate. However, this was 6 percentage points above the sector response rate. Within the UHI region we are working collaboratively to harmonise quality arrangements and use the SFC SSES and internally devised early student satisfaction surveys as benchmark tools to agree annual improvement measures that can be implemented across the region, within curriculum areas or within individual partners. This benefits the region as well as each individual partner.