

Response to Outcomes of HMIE Review

Context

Stow College was last reviewed by HMIE in May 2010. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) requires each college to produce a report setting out its response to the main outcomes of the HMIE review one year after the full report of the review has been published. This document summarises Stow College's response to the five Main Points for Action identified in the HMIE review report, September 2010.

HMIE has since visited the Stow College in June 2011 for an annual engagement visit. The HMIE report from that visit noted that *the college has made progress in addressing all the main points for action.*

Main points for action:

The college should improve retention and attainment rates for learners on full-time FE programmes.

The college established targets in terms of retention and attainment for all courses. These were widely publicised to staff and learners. Teaching departments reported on progress against these targets at the college's Learning and Teaching Council which meets quarterly. Performance against target was also monitored on a monthly basis at the college's Performance Monitoring Committee. Programmes which had given cause for concern were put on 'special measures' and heads of teaching departments were required to provide more detailed analyses for these programmes (for example, reasons for learners leaving these courses).

All teaching departments reviewed their interview and selection procedures and entry requirements were revised for some courses.

Assessment schedules were revised to ensure that there was a better spread of assessments and this had a positive response from learners.

Programme structures were reviewed to make them more relevant and engaging to learners. In some instances, the number of assessed units was reduced to allow for more support to be put in place.

The college academic year was reviewed and a three block year was introduced in August 2011. It is intended that the three block year will give learners earlier positive feedback on their progress and will also allow more time for staff development and course team meetings.

The learner induction programme was amended to allow for a more extended induction during the first block.

Retention on full-time FE programmes has increased from 77% in AY2009/10 to 79% in AY 2010/11. Overall, Early Retention and Retention have increased by 4% and 2% respectively.

The college should further improve its arrangements for action planning and monitoring for equality and diversity.

The college has developed and implemented a Single Equality Scheme which is linked to the Strategic Plan and to departmental annual reports.

The Equality Diversity and Inclusion Working Group was expanded in September 2010 to include all heads of teaching departments and external stakeholders. This allowed a wider debate to take place about the effectiveness of monitoring Equality, Diversity and Inclusion data. As a result of this, data was provided to the departments at programme level to facilitate a more in-depth analysis of comparative performance. A review of the annual course report began at the start of the current session with the intention of introducing a more effective method of live self-evaluation throughout the year. The result of this review will be implemented at the end of the first term in the current academic year.

An on-line training programme was completed by all staff in the College during academic year 2010/11. The College Management team also received additional cultural awareness training by an external agency.

Following a restructuring of the college in June 2011, a Transitional Projects Manager has been appointed, with a half-time (0.5 FTE) remit for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

The college should continue to develop arrangements to ensure that learners are fully engaged in enhancing their own learning.

The Student Liaison Officer post was increased from 0.5 full-time equivalent to full-time and a Learner Engagement Assistant was appointed.

A revised model for Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) was introduced to make the ILP process more 'user-friendly' for learners and staff. An online version of the ILP was piloted. In addition, the use of the Mahara e-portfolio software for personal development planning was extended to more class groups.

Space Unlimited was commissioned by the college to work with learners and staff on learner engagement issues. An initial project allowed learners to explore the question 'How can students and staff at Stow College become more engaged in enhancing learning and teaching in the college, now and in the future?' Following the success of this project, a more extensive programme was devised with Space Unlimited with the aims of: encouraging a positive learning culture within the college; enhancing learning and teaching across the whole college; and supporting excellence in learner engagement. In phase one of this programme, learners and staff explored the question 'What is effective learning and teaching?' The results of phase one of the programme were explored by staff at a one-day all-staff conference in August 2011. The response to the feedback was overwhelmingly positive and the programme is about to enter phase two of four planned phases.

Teaching departments increased the number of learner focus group meetings and this resulted in a faster response to issues raised by learners. In one activity, learners were asked to identify and prioritise features of effective learning and teaching.

A new student representatives' training programme has been developed by the Faculty of Trade Union Education and Workplace Learning. The purpose of this programme is to supplement the training offered by SPARQS and to assist student representatives to become more effective at representing their peers. This will be piloted in September 2011.

The college should ensure that teaching staff use a wide range of teaching approaches, and signpost essential skills during lesson delivery.

A college Learning and Teaching framework was introduced in August 2010 with extensive discussion and contributions from teaching departments. The framework set out aims and priorities for effective learning and teaching. This raised the priority of learning and teaching within the college.

Each of the six teaching departments developed Departmental Learning and Teaching plans. These provided a focus for discussions on learning and teaching and for continuing professional development related to learning and teaching activities.

Teaching staff carried out an exercise to identify and prioritise the most important features of an effective lesson. This initiated a great deal of useful discussion around the issues of effective teaching and learning. In January 2011, all teaching staff attended a session on 'How to provide opportunities for learners to enhance their own learning'. Online questionnaires to gather learners' views on learning and teaching were used in a number of departments.

A Learning and Teaching conference took place in August 2010 which offered a range of workshops including Curriculum for Excellence; Using Moodle; Using Mahara to Support ILPs; JISC EduApps (free software tools for learners and teachers); Creating Multiple Choice Questions; and Managing Assessments using Moodle. The use of the Moodle virtual learning environment has increased by 77% in a year.

All teaching staff attended a session on 'Supporting you to support your students' in August 2010. Learner Champions also delivered a session on their role and the support they could provide. By increasing the variety of teaching approaches used, staff better catered for the learning styles and preferences of individual learners.

Senior Managers should provide clear direction to teaching staff to promote individual reflection on their professional practice, which leads to improvement.

Departmental Learning and Teaching Plans were introduced and programme level targets for retention and attainment were established and closely monitored by college operational committees and teaching staff.

There was a greater emphasis placed on sharing good practice in learning and teaching, through Learning and Teaching Conferences held within the college. The conferences allowed Stow college staff and external agencies to showcase good practice in learning and teaching.

The Space Unlimited programme discussed above gave staff extensive opportunities to reflect on their professional practice. Staff development activities supported by Scotland's Colleges, JISC and other bodies helped to promote individual reflection on the part of teaching staff.

As a result of a restructuring of the college in June 2011, a Transitional Projects Manager: Excellence in Learning and Teaching has been appointed. Part of this person's remit is to advise Faculty staff on Leadership for Learning.

Conclusion

The College has made significant progress with the Main Points for Action that were identified by HMIe in the report published on 10th September 2010. The college has identified a number of actions to address the issues raised by HMIe and continues to ensure that they are being comprehensively implemented.

K Ramsay, Chair
Board of Management

(Report endorsed at the meeting of14/9/..... 2011)