



A report by HM Inspectors on behalf of the
Scottish Further Education Funding Council

Coatbridge College

A summary of the main report

19 May 2006

The review process

HM Inspectors undertake an independent review of the quality of provision in further education colleges on behalf of the Scottish Further Education Funding Council under a service level agreement between the council and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE). Review teams include HM Inspectors, associate assessors and a lay member.

Each review, based on a proportionate model, has inter-related phases: *review phase one* and the *follow-through phase*. During *review phase one*, review teams evaluate the *learning and teaching process*, *learner progress and outcomes* and *leadership and quality management*. The outcome of this phase informs the scope of the *follow-through phase*. During the *follow-through phase*, review teams explore good practice that may have potential for wider dissemination across the sector. They also explore further as appropriate, the causes, impact and extent of significant weaknesses identified in *review phase one*.

During reviews, members of review teams observe learning and teaching and hold discussions with learners and staff. They examine information on learner attainment and evaluate learner progress and outcomes. They meet with members of the Board of Management and obtain feedback from community groups, partners and employers that work with the college.

This report contains confidence statements that express the review team's overall evaluation of *learning and teaching process*, *learner progress and outcomes* and *leadership and quality management*. It also contains grades for particular aspects of provision.

The primary purpose of this report is to convey a summary of the main outcomes arising from the review.

This report uses the following word scale to make clear the evaluations made by review teams.

very good	major strengths
good	strengths outweigh weaknesses
fair	some important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

The report also uses the following words to describe numbers and proportions

almost all	over 90%
most	75-90%
majority	50-74%
more than a few	15-49%
few	up to 15%

A separate report has been published simultaneously to convey fully the main outcomes arising from the review, to acknowledge the college's strengths and to provide a clear agenda for future action to improve and enhance quality.

Both reports are available on the HMIE website www.hmie.gov.uk. The website will give you easy access to review and inspection reports and a wide range of other publications. It will also provide you with more information on the work of HMIE and its role in Scottish education.

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1. Introduction

The college and its context

In carrying out the review of Coatbridge College, HMIE took the following college context fully into account.

Coatbridge College, established in 1891, has been operating from its main campus in Kildonan Street, Coatbridge since 1930. It provides education and training primarily to residents of the towns of Coatbridge and Airdrie. The college employs around 280 staff, caters for around 4500 learners per year and offers a broad curriculum. A higher than average proportion of the local working-age population has no qualifications and the proportion in employment is below the Scottish and UK average.

Most of the college's activity takes place at the main campus. However, by working with local partners, the college also provides access to education in local schools and in community venues.

After taking up post in November 2004, the current principal immediately accelerated a programme of development in relation to the college estate, policy and the curriculum. Within a period of twelve months, the college had gained Chartermark status, achieved SQMS accreditation and had undertaken a successful assessment for Investors in People.

In 1978 the college upgraded its main building and, in 1986, it opened an adjoining second building. The differing levels between the buildings and the absence of a lift in the main building make it difficult and sometimes impossible for learners with mobility impairments to access specific areas of the main building.

Recently the college secured funding for the construction of a new replacement nursery to be located on the main campus and completed by August 2006. The planned capacity of the new nursery is more than double that of the existing facility. The college is also in discussion with the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFC) regarding options to develop the main campus further and improve access for learners to all areas.

In the current strategic plan, the college has re-expressed its mission in the following way:

“ we seek to offer high-quality, enterprising lifelong learning opportunities which are accessible to and meet the needs of individuals and organisations within the communities we serve ”

In the last two years, college managers have re-established constructive partnerships with the local enterprise company, the local council and community groups and shared with these groups their commitment to improving access and inclusion. The college has links with several HEIs, the strongest being with Bell College and Glasgow Caledonian University.

The college revenue budget for 2005-06 is around £8.5m with grant-in-aid from SFC accounting for around 70% of the total.

The review

The review by HMIE took place in two phases in the weeks beginning 21 November 2005 (*review phase one*) and 23 January 2006 (*follow-through phase*).

The review team examined key cross-college functions and processes that have a direct impact on the quality of the learner experience. The review also covered seven subject areas in the college, together with a focus on core skills and flexible learning, as follows.

Business, management and administration

Care

Computing and ICT

Engineering: motor vehicle

Hairdressing, beauty and complementary therapies

Science

Special programmes

These areas, in which the provision ranged from levels 1 to 8 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), accounted for more than 65% of the college's work.

The review involved scrutiny of documentation provided by the college and interviews with senior and middle managers, Board members with a responsibility for overseeing the work of committees concerned with educational issues, learners, employers, external agencies and other users of the college. During *review phase one*, the review team focused on learning and teaching, learner progress and outcomes, and leadership and quality management. During the *follow-through phase*, the review team explored a number of issues requiring further scrutiny and discussed fully the examples of sector-leading and innovative practice identified in this report.

2. Executive summary

The following are holistic judgements made by HMIE relating to the key areas of the learning and teaching process, learner progress and outcomes, and leadership and quality management.

2.1 Confidence statements:

- **HMIE is confident that Coatbridge College has in place effective learning and teaching processes. However, the college needs to address the weaknesses in learning and teaching in computing and ICT.**
- **HMIE is not confident that learners are progressing well and achieving appropriate outcomes. However, in more than a few subjects, programme retention and attainment is high.**
- **HMIE is confident that the college is managing well, and improving the quality of, its services for learners. However, the college needs to improve the arrangements for guidance and support and resources and services to support the learner.**

2.2 HMIE identified a number of ways in which the college demonstrated its ability to deliver quality provision and services, and sustain and enhance them.

- The learning and teaching process was *very good* in three of the seven subject areas and *good* in three other areas.
- Learner progress and outcomes were *very good* in two of the seven subject areas and *good* in one.
- Committed, enthusiastic and inclusive leadership had led to substantial recent development and improvement activity across the college.
- Effective collaboration with key local stakeholders had been instrumental in informing college plans and curriculum direction.
- The college had a well-developed estates strategy which included a comprehensive campus re-development programme.
- The college had developed clear and comprehensive policies and procedures, founded on appropriate external quality standards, for almost all areas of activity that had an impact on the learner experience.
- Most staff demonstrated a commitment to improving the quality of the student learning experience.

2.3 The college should seek to improve:

- Learner progress and outcomes in those subjects where there are important or major weaknesses;
- Arrangements for both planning and evaluating the delivery of services;
- Specific aspects of its arrangements for learner guidance and support;
- Cross-college arrangements for core skills delivery;
- Arrangements to promote access and safety; and
- Equalities training and induction arrangements for new staff.

2.4 Summary of grades awarded

Subject Area	Learning and teaching process	Learner progress and outcomes
Business, management and administration	Good	Good
Care	Good	Fair
Computing and ICT	Fair	Unsatisfactory
Engineering: motor vehicle	Good	Fair
Hairdressing, beauty and complementary therapies	Very good	Very good
Science	Very good	Fair
Special programmes	Very good	Very good

Cross-college elements	Grade
Educational leadership, direction and management	Good
Access and inclusion	Good
Guidance and support	Fair
Resources and services to support the learner	Fair
Staff	Good
Quality assurance	Good
Quality improvement	Good

3. Overall findings in subject areas

This section of the report summarises our overall findings in subject areas. A full version of our findings in each subject is available in section 4 of the main report, available from our website at www.hmie.gov.uk.

3.1 Learning and teaching process

HMIE is confident that Coatbridge College has in place effective learning and teaching processes. However, the college needs to address the weaknesses in learning and teaching in computing and ICT.

- Most learners were well motivated and engaged actively and effectively in their learning activities.
- Learners developed independence in learning in most areas. This was particularly apparent in care, in hairdressing, beauty and complementary therapies, in science, and in special programmes.
- In almost all subjects, teaching staff made effective use of their professional and subject knowledge in their teaching approaches and in setting appropriate standards.
- Learners in most subject areas used effectively the resources available, to support their learning and development.
- In a majority of subject areas staff and learners used ICT well as a tool to support learning.
- Most teaching staff used their awareness of students' learning needs to tailor learning and teaching approaches to meet those needs. In general, staff used a variety of effective learning and teaching approaches.
- Staff in almost all areas related theory and practice well through appropriate contextualisation of materials or work-based examples.
- Positive staff-learner relationships helped to support a purposeful atmosphere for learning in most lessons.
- Teaching staff generally planned activities well to include development of knowledge, understanding and a range of skills, including personal, core and vocational skills.

However:

- In a few subjects, learners' poor attendance slowed progress.
- Staff in a few areas did not share good practice in learning and teaching systematically.
- In computing and ICT, staff did not always engage learners sufficiently, and staff approaches to developing learners' personal, citizenship and broader skills for employability were not well developed.
- Learning was adversely affected by poor accommodation and equipment in a few subject areas.

3.2 Learner progress and outcomes

HMIE is not confident that learners are progressing well and achieving appropriate outcomes. However, in more than a few subjects, programme retention and attainment is high.

- In hairdressing, beauty and complementary therapies, and in special programmes, learners made very good progress from their prior attainment.
- In general across the college, learners developed relevant vocational knowledge, skills and understanding.
- In most subjects, learners gained self-confidence and some developed their core skills further.
- Learners developed skills that would improve their employability in almost all subjects. In a few subjects, learners who left programmes early often did so to take up suitable employment.
- The development of skills for citizenship was particularly good amongst learners in care and beauty therapy.
- Learners attained well in award-bearing programmes in business, management and administration, in hairdressing, beauty and complementary therapies and in special programmes.
- Retention rates among learners in special programmes were particularly high.

However:

- There were more than a few programmes across the college where learner achievement was particularly low, and learners on a few programmes had a low awareness of their core skills development.
- There was poor retention in programmes in computing and ICT, in science and in a few other programmes across the college.
- Unit attainment was low in computing and ICT, in care and in science.
- Learner attainment was low in more than a few specific care, motor vehicle and science programmes, and very low in full-time computing and ICT programmes.

3.3 Other significant factors

The purpose of this section of the report is to summarise other factors which had a significant impact on the learning and teaching process, and learner progress and outcomes.

The college's strengthened relationships with external partners and agencies had informed the development of a range of learning opportunities and programmes, particularly for learners at access level and for learners with additional support needs.

The college had made significant improvements in the overall decoration, furnishings and equipment in the main buildings. However, on occasion, technical difficulties and poor accommodation and equipment diminished the learning experience and learners' progress.

There were many examples where staff had developed learner support notes and teaching materials of a high standard that supported learning well.

Most teaching and support staff were enthusiastic and committed to delivering interesting and effective learning experiences and some updated their specialist knowledge on a regular basis. Well-qualified, experienced and committed staff worked cooperatively with each other and partner agencies to support learner development and progress.

In a few instances assessment planning had not been effective in providing suitable balance in learners' workloads.

There were some weaknesses in the implementation of arrangements for guidance and support. Occasionally the on-programme guidance, including recording and monitoring of learner progress was not systematic and learners at HN level were not all clear about the arrangements in place for guidance and support. In science, more than a few students who had been enrolled on HN programmes did not have the necessary prior knowledge and understanding to support study at that level. Weaknesses in guidance and support meant that learners who required support did not always receive it timeously. However, developments in guidance arrangements were helping to address these matters.

The college had re-emphasised the importance of assuring and improving the quality of the learner experience by using more systematic and formal approaches and had made improvements in aspects of self-evaluation activity. However, action points arising through self-evaluation activity did not always address the key factors that had led to low attainment and retention. In some instances there was insufficient evaluation of the learning and teaching process by staff.

4. Findings on leadership and quality management

This section of the report summarises our overall findings in cross-college areas. A full version of our findings is contained in section 5 of the main report, available from our website at www.hmie.gov.uk.

HMIE is confident that the college is managing well, and improving the quality of, its services for learners. However, the college needs to improve the arrangements for guidance and support and for resources and services to support the learner.

4.1 Educational provision: design, planning and management

Educational leadership, direction and management

- The principal provided committed, enthusiastic and inclusive leadership that had resulted in substantial development in the organisation.
- The college's clear and comprehensive aims and objectives provided an appropriate framework for operational management.
- Staff at all levels were included in the planning processes, resulting in wide ownership of planning outcomes, empowerment of middle managers, and enhanced ownership by staff of decisions taken.
- The newly-constituted student affairs sub-committee was designed to enhance the learner voice and learner representation.
- Staff were responsive to initiatives that had improved the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels.
- Effective collaboration with many key local stakeholders had been effective in informing college plans and curriculum direction.

Access and inclusion

- The college's clear vision and commitment to promote inclusion, equality and fairness were supported by effective strategies and good collaborative arrangements.
- The college promoted equal opportunities, tolerance and inclusion prominently and effectively.
- The college had developed appropriate and productive relationships with key staff from relevant external bodies and agencies, including local employers, local community groups and secondary schools.
- Information on programmes for learners was readily available through the user-friendly college prospectus, available in Braille and alternative formats.
- A comprehensive range of events and activities in the college, local secondary schools and community outreach settings promoted effectively the opportunities available for potential learners.
- There were good arrangements in place for supporting learners with young children.

4.2 Learner services, resources and staff

Guidance and support

- The college's "one-stop-shop" provided learners with access to useful and responsive services in the areas of admissions, initial guidance, student finance and careers guidance.
- On-programme academic guidance was effective for the majority of learners on full-time non-advanced programmes, and academic and centralised learner support staff provided learners with appropriate guidance into further study and employment.
- The Horizon Centre was well-resourced to provide facilities for both learners and academic staff and help support learners with additional support needs.
- The recent reconfiguration of learner services had led to more effective deployment of central staff to support learners.
- The appointment of staff in new, key roles had contributed to an improving service in the guidance and support.

Resources and services to support the learner

- The college had a well-developed estate strategy which included a comprehensive campus re-development.
- A programme of replacement and upgrading of ICT hardware and software, with the inclusion of internet-enabled data points in the majority of classrooms, supported the use of ICT for learning and teaching.
- Communal space for learners was bright, clean and well maintained. It was popular with learners and included a common room and refectory which served healthy-choice food.
- The college upgrading programme in and around the buildings and the relocation of key functions had improved access to services for all learners.

Staff

- Overall the college had sufficient teaching and support staff with appropriate qualifications.
- Procedures relating to recruitment and selection and promotion of equal opportunities were clear and available on the college intranet along with other human resource policies.
- The college had delivered effective training to improve the ICT skills of teaching staff recently and was using training needs analysis to inform future requirements.
- An effective programme of professional qualifications was available through twilight provision. It included the PDA Introduction to Teaching in FE, a TQ(FE) programme delivered flexibly by the University of Aberdeen and an HN unit in evaluating learning and teaching effectiveness being piloted with a group of staff.

4.3 Quality assurance, improvement and enhancement

- The college had developed clear and comprehensive policies and procedures for almost all areas of activity that had an impact on the learner experience. These were founded on appropriate external quality standards.
- Almost all staff were clear about their role and their responsibilities for quality assurance and about how college self-evaluation and review arrangements were designed to improve the learner experience.
- The head of quality provided helpful feedback to teams to develop further the effectiveness of quality assurance activities that impacted on the learner experience.
- Staff demonstrated a strong commitment to improving the quality of the student learning experience and had engaged well in more formal approaches to reflective practice.
- The college had identified good practice from a range of external sources and had adopted appropriate aspects to inform improvement in a range of activities.
- The college had implemented significant improvements to address weaknesses and to enhance the learner experience.

5. Main points for action

Educational provision: design, planning and management

- The college should ensure that all academic department, teaching section and support area operational plans contain outcome-focused targets with clearly designated responsibilities and timescales for achievement.
- The college should develop and implement a learning and teaching strategy that brings together staff development plans, peer review and ICT to further enhance learning and teaching approaches.
- The college should ensure its policy for the protection of children and young people is developed fully and approved as a matter of urgency.
- The college should ensure that arrangements for evaluating and planning services to promote access and inclusion involve all relevant key staff and take account of all relevant issues.
- The college should improve the range of progression options for learners from pre-access and flexible learning programmes, to allow them to build on their prior learning and experience.

Learner services, resources and staff

- The college should address the weaknesses in academic guidance for full-time HN learners to enable learners to benefit fully from the arrangements.
- Managers should ensure that cross-college arrangements for core skills development support effectively the needs of learners.
- Staff should review personal learning support plans on a regular basis to ensure arrangements are effective.
- The college should ensure that suitable facilities are available for learners to have private interviews when discussing financial or personal matters.
- Managers should ensure that staff in all specialist teaching areas are clear about their responsibilities for risk assessment.
- The college should adopt a more pro-active approach to publicising suitable educational websites to encourage independent learning and promote access for part-time learners.
- The college should rectify shortcomings in access and safety arrangements.
- Managers should ensure that the staff induction arrangements, including where necessary an introduction to learning and teaching, assessment and classroom management, are implemented consistently.
- The college should ensure that all staff engage in comprehensive equalities training.

Quality assurance, improvement and enhancement

- The college should ensure that all staff implement fully its internal moderation procedures.
- The college should ensure that PI data held centrally agrees with information used by programme teams in order to provide a consistent picture of student retention and attainment.
- The college should ensure that all self-evaluation review reports are evaluative, identify explicit improvement targets and are used to monitor progress against action points.

6. Sector-leading and innovative practice

Examples of sector-leading and innovative practice identified during the review may be found in section 7 of the full report, available on our website at www.hmie.gov.uk.

7. What happens next?

The college should address weaknesses in subject areas and the main points for action associated with the findings on leadership and quality management in this report. SFC will consider the report and write to the college indicating the scope and nature of further engagement by the college with SFC and HMIE.

8. How can you contact us?

If you would like an additional copy of this report

Copies of this report have been sent to the principal and college staff, the Chair of the Board of Management and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA or by telephoning 01506 600273. Copies are also available on our website at www.hmie.gov.uk.

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Angus Allan
HM Inspector

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Appendix

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

SCQF levels	SQA National Units, courses and group awards	Higher Education (HE) qualifications	SVQs	SCQF levels
12		Doctorate		12
11		Masters	SVQ 5	11
10		Honours degree		10
9		Ordinary degree		9
8		HND Diploma of HE	SVQ 4	8
7	Advanced Higher	HNC Certificate of HE		7
6	Higher		SVQ 3	6
5	Intermediate 2/ Credit S Grade		SVQ 2	5
4	Intermediate 1/ General S Grade		SVQ 1	4
3	Access 3/ Foundation S Grade			3
2	Access 2			2
1	Access 1			1

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework brings together all Scottish mainstream qualifications into a single unified framework. The framework includes: degree provision, HNC and HND, SQA National Qualifications, and SVQs. There are 12 levels ranging from Access 1 at SCQF level 1 to Doctorate at SCQF level 12. Each qualification whether a unit, group of units or larger group award has also been allocated a number of SCQF credits. Each credit represents 10 notional hours of required learning. Doctorates based on a thesis are an exception to this.

Other learning may be credit rated and included in the framework provided it leads to a clear set of learning outcomes and has quality assured learner assessment.

The positioning of SVQ in the table gives an indication of their place in the framework. Work is ongoing to allocate SCQF credits to them.

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) works to improve education in Scotland. HM Inspectors review the quality of education in further education colleges under a memorandum of understanding with the Scottish Further Education Funding Council (SFEFC). HM Inspectors also inspect pre-school centres, primary and secondary schools, special schools, community learning, initial teacher education, local authorities, and the care and welfare of learners in both day and residential schools. We publish the findings of our reviews in short, clear reports and put them on our website. We identify and promote the good practice we find. We draw on our overall knowledge to provide independent advice to Scottish Ministers, SFEFC, relevant departments of the Scottish Executive and others.

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