Education Scotland
Foghlam Alba

Item 13

16 September 2021

Dear colleague

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIE) programme for 2021-22

I hope that you and your colleagues have had a restful summer break and that the beginning of the new academic year has been as smooth as possible in the current circumstances.

HMIE have now agreed with the Scottish Funding Council the arrangements to resume a programme of engagement in colleges in the coming year. I am writing to let you know what will be included in this year's programme and to outline how HMIE will approach our forthcoming activities.

Firstly, it important to be clear that HMIE are aware that, with colleges now open for the new term, college staff, their learners and stakeholders face ongoing challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In preparing for the year ahead, we have been mindful of this and are also fully aware of the changing situation re COVID-19 and the plans set out below may change depending on public health advice and local circumstances driven by the pandemic.

HMIE will continue to place emphasis on support to colleges and will take forward a planned approach to resuming the range of engagement activities as the year progresses. Our approach will have three main aspects; ongoing engagement by link HM Inspectors; thematic reviews; and progress visits. The attached briefing note provides further detail for you and your staff regarding this approach. We are keen to learn from colleges about the work underway to address the impact of COVID-19 and support recovery. We also want to gather and share any adaptations made to practice during the past 18 months that have been successful and will continue. In order to minimise burden on colleges, requests for documentation in advance of engagement will be minimal.

One aspect of our work that we are hugely proud of and value highly is the direct involvement of learners as Student Team Members (STMs). We are looking to add to our current team of STMs and will be seeking applications shortly. It would be very helpful if you could encourage suitably experienced learners from within your Student Association to consider applying. Further details about the application process will be issued to you separately, and to Student Associations.

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For Scotland's learners,
with Scotland's educators

Thank you for your continued support. We look forward to working with you in the coming year.

Yours sincerely

Gayle Gorman
HM Chief Inspector of Education

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Briefing note for colleges: approaches to quality assurance and external engagement 2021-22

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Background

In March 2020, Education Scotland took a number of steps to relieve pressure on the education system, including pausing scrutiny activities and extending this for the duration of academic year (AY) 2020-21. Since then, link HM Inspectors have worked closely with individual colleges to understand their approaches to the provision of remote and blended learning, and to identify and promote best practice approaches. This work has informed the approach to assurance and improvement for the coming academic year, and recognises that AY 2021-22 is a continuation of interim recovery arrangements.

What is Education Scotland's approach to quality assurance and support for recovery during AY 2021-22?

During AY 2021-22 HM Inspectors of Education will undertake three main aspects of quality assurance and enhancement in colleges:

1. Ongoing Engagement

HM Inspectors have worked throughout the pandemic to maintain regular dialogue with all colleges. This approach will continue to be an important aspect of our engagement during AY 2021-22. Link HM Inspectors will carry out both in-person and virtual visits. They will work with colleges to take account of risk assessment and COVID-19 guidance to support ongoing capacity-building and evaluation of progress toward recovery.

2. Thematic Reviews

In order to support improvement in aspects of college sector performance, HM Inspectors will undertake a programme of thematic reviews. Areas for thematic review will be agreed with SFC, with at least one thematic review being undertaken jointly with QAA Scotland. HM Inspectors will seek to identify and share examples of highly effective practice, what is working well, what needs to improve, and the impact on learner outcomes. HM Inspectors will plan to include in-person visits as part of thematic reviews when this is safe and appropriate, and will work with colleges to take account of risk assessment and COVID-19 guidance when planning activities. If necessary and appropriate, a number of engagements may be undertaken virtually. Each thematic review will result in the publication of a national report.

3. Progress Visits

Prior to March 2020, 18 of the planned 27 college Progress Visits (PV) were concluded. As a result of college closures and the pausing of scrutiny activity, nine colleges did not undergo their scheduled PV. Previously, PV methodology was focused on college-devised enhancement plans, all of which were developed prior to the onset of COVID-19. During 2021/22, HM Inspectors will recommence PVs to explore the impact of the pandemic on the college and how colleges are addressing the impact of COVID-19 and support recovery. To minimise the reporting burden, and in line with SFC Outcome Agreement

guidance, evaluation of progress will be informed by college internal approaches to self-evaluation and improvement planning.

Each visit will result in feedback regarding the effectiveness of college's self-evaluation reporting, identification of what is working well and what requires improvement. Visits will consider the experience of learners and how well they are attaining. A schedule of PVs will be developed prioritising visits to colleges based on (a) joint intelligence sharing with SFC and other relevant agencies, (b) college performance data, and (c) timing and outcomes of previous visits. It is envisaged that the PV schedule will commence in **November 2021,** and all PVs will be concluded by **end May 2022**.

3.1 What is the Progress Visit methodology for AY 2021-22?

In preparing for the PVs, we will be mindful of the changing situation re COVID-19 and the plans set out below may change depending on public health advice and local circumstances driven by the pandemic. College risk assessments will form an important part of pre-visit planning.

PVs will be managed by a Lead HM Inspector (LI) who will be accompanied by a second HMI, normally the college Link HM Inspector. Associate Assessors (AAs) and Student Team Members (STMs) will be deployed to support PVs. Team size will be planned to take into account of the size and scale of each college and of COVID mitigations and guidance.

PV planning will be intelligence-led. Pre-visit planning discussions will be held with SFC to establish aspects for exploration in particular colleges. A range of evidence sources will be considered including:

- Performance Indicators (PIs)
- College self-evaluation and improvement plans
- SFC intelligence re: performance
- Learner feedback
- Stakeholder feedback re: performance e.g. senior phase, SCP provision

This will inform the scale and scope for each visit, tailored to the specific circumstances of individual colleges.

Colleges will identify a senior manager to act as college nominee and liaise with the Lead HM Inspector. A visit schedule will be agreed in advance which takes account of college risk assessment and COVID-19 mitigations and guidance. The schedule will include meetings held with college senior leaders, managers, staff, learners and stakeholders. It is expected that colleges will evidence how stakeholders have been engaged in college evaluation for improvement processes. HM Inspectors will plan to include in-person engagement, and will work with colleges to take account of risk assessment and COVID-19 guidance when planning PVs. If necessary and appropriate, a number of meetings may be conducted virtually. Colleges will be required to provide a short written context statement outlining their approach to quality improvement and provide copies of self-evaluation and improvement planning documentation in advance. The PV team will meet at the end of each day to discuss their findings and these meetings will be attended by the college nominee.

3.2 What does Education Scotland focus on during a progress visit?

For AY 2021-22 Progress Visits, colleges will provide details of their existing self-evaluation and improvement/enhancement processes and documentation to inform PV planning. Other than a short context statement, there will be **no requirement** to complete and submit any separate PV documentation. The team will engage in professional dialogue and review relevant documentation made available during the visit.

College approaches to improving outcomes for learners and the quality of the learning experience will be a core aspect of the PVs. Colleges will be required to demonstrate the effectiveness of their arrangements to evaluate learning and teaching practice, including remote learning. PVs will not routinely involve observation of learning and teaching, however, HM Inspectors may include lesson observations if deemed appropriate.

Learner engagement is fundamental to the college's ability to identify areas for improvement to the learner experience. Learners are partners in supporting improvement and colleges should have effective arrangements in place for engaging learners in contributing to enhancement activities. During PVs, HMIs, AAs and STMs will engage in conversations with groups of learners to identify the progress they are making and how effectively they engage in and influence their individual learning experiences.

By focusing on outcomes and impact, and observing practice and experiences directly, HM Inspectors will support college staff to reflect on what is working well and what needs to improve. HM Inspectors will make arrangements in conjunction with College Development Network to ensure that highly effective practice, where identified, is disseminated to support improvement.

3.3 Who carries out progress visits?

PVs will be led by HM Inspectors, AAs and an STM.

PVs will normally be carried out across two to three days. The size of team and duration of the visit will be adjusted in line with the context of each college. Team size will be planned to take into account the size and scale of each college and of COVID mitigations and guidance.

3.4 How will we carry out the progress visit?

PVs are planned collaboratively between the college, HM Inspectors and SFC. Prior to the visit, colleges will have the opportunity to provide relevant updates, identified through self-evaluation, to reflect the progress made and highlight any changes in circumstances. The work of HM Inspectors will be in line with the PRAISE framework which is used to help establish and maintain positive relationships with all involved. HM Inspectors recognise that all discussions and engagements are opportunities to share and develop thinking, and to learn from each other. Pre-visit planning and engagement will be undertaken virtually.

Throughout the visit, team members will involve managers and staff in professional dialogue, with the aim of supporting improvement. Through this approach HM Inspectors will work with college staff and should ensure that the visit experience is a collaborative process.

3.5 Notification of the progress visit

Colleges will be informed in writing of the agreed date for their PV approximately six weeks in advance of commencement of the visit.

3.6 What happens during a progress visit?

The starting point will be the college's own evaluation of the quality of their provision and improvements required. We will ask the college to outline the progress they have made and the impact it has had, on achievement of improvement actions and the experience of learners. Thereafter the team will review relevant documentation, and engage in professional dialogue with managers, staff, student representatives, other groups of learners and, where required, other key stakeholders.

Discussions will focus on their involvement in delivering the targets and milestones identified by the college. The team will also discuss with learners the impact of improvement actions.

3.7 How do we share our findings?

On conclusion of the PV, the team will provide a verbal report of their findings to the college. This will include commentary on the accuracy and effectiveness of a college's self-evaluation approaches, progress made against improvement targets, and the experiences and outcomes of learners. It will provide assurance of the quality of the learning experience as the college recovers from COVID-19, and may identify aspects requiring further improvement.

3.8 What happens after the progress visit?

Following our internal quality assurance processes, a written report will be produced and shared with the college and SFC. The report **will not** be published. The college will have the opportunity to comment if they wish, within five working days. Approximately five weeks after the PV is completed, a final written report will be provided to the college and the Lead HM Inspector will make arrangements to share the report with the college Board. For multi-college regions, a representative of the Regional Strategic Body (RSB) will be invited to attend and the report will also be shared with the RSB.
PV outcomes will inform future engagement approaches with individual colleges.

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