Forth Valley College
13 May 2016

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

Full report

The external review process

HM Inspectors undertake an independent review of the quality of provision in Scotland's colleges on behalf of the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFC) under a service level agreement between the council and Education Scotland. External review teams include HM Inspectors, associate assessors and a student team member.

During external reviews, members of the review teams observe learning and teaching and hold discussions with learners, staff and stakeholders. They consider 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 who work with the college.

The purpose of this report is to convey the main outcomes arising from the external review, to acknowledge the college's strengths and to provide a clear agenda for future action to improve and enhance quality.

This external review results in judgements of **effective** or **limited effectiveness** or **not effective** that express the external review team's overall evaluation of *high quality learning, learner engagement* and *quality culture.*

The report also uses the following terms to describe numbers and proportions:	
almost all	over 90%
most	75-90%
majority	50-74%
less than half	15-49%
few	up to 15%

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1. Introduction

The external review

The external review by Education Scotland took place during the week beginning 14 March 2016.

We examined learning and teaching and other important activities that impact on the quality of the learner experience. We evaluated these against the three key principles of *high quality learning*, *learner engagement* and *quality culture*, using the 13 reference quality indicators (QI) outlined in *External quality arrangements for Scotland's colleges, updated August 2013*. We also included QIs 1.3 *Adherence to statutory principles* and 2.2 *How well do programmes and services meet learners* needs to support our evaluations. We used information from previous visits to the college to decide the scope of the review.

We found examples of excellence which we describe in this report on pages 18-20.

The external review team talked with learners, staff at all levels in the college, members of the Board of Management, employers, external agencies and other users of the college.

2. The college and its context

In carrying out the external review of Forth Valley College, Education Scotland took the following college context fully into account.

Forth Valley College was established in 2005 as a merged regional college serving the needs of the three communities in Falkirk, Stirling and Clackmannanshire. In geographic and industrial terms, the Forth Valley region is very diverse, from the nationally significant oil, gas and chemical sectors in Grangemouth, to the hospitality, tourism and heritage sectors in Stirling and the rural communities. The college delivers programmes in three main campuses at Falkirk, Stirling and Alloa, and also has a presence on Raploch Community Campus in Stirling. The college works in close partnership with the three local authorities of Falkirk, Clackmannanshire and Stirling.

In 2014-15, the college enrolled around 15,000 learners of whom 22% were studying full-time. Approximately 60% of enrolled learners are based on the Falkirk campus, with 25% at Stirling (including Raploch) and 15% in Alloa. Within the past few years the college has completed new estates developments in Alloa and Stirling. It has also recently developed a full business case for a new campus in Falkirk, planned for completion in 2019. The college works with a range of strategic partners across the region and further afield, having links with many industries and businesses operating in Scotland, across the UK and internationally.

The college delivers an extensive range of vocational programmes. Full-time further education (FE) programmes at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels 1-6, are distributed across the three college campuses. The college has intentionally balanced its specialist resources, equipment and teaching expertise for higher education (HE) programmes at SCQF levels 7-10 across individual campuses. Working closely with its three local authorities, the college has established a comprehensive range of school-college partnership activity. Around a third of school-college learners attend the School College Opportunities to Succeed (SCOTS) programme. This initiative supports S4 learners at risk of not progressing onto a positive destination to experience study at college and then embark on a college programme. The college offers six degree programmes with the University of Stirling and two Associate Student programmes with Heriot Watt and Strathclyde Universities. The college is contracted with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to deliver an overall target of 86,214 Credits in 2015-16. It currently employs 637 members of staff and has a revenue budget of £29,883,437, of which 66% is grant-in-aid from SFC.

3. Outcomes of External Review

Judgement of *Effectiveness*

Section A: Overarching judgement

Forth Valley College has in place **effective** arrangements to maintain and enhance the quality of its provision and outcomes for learners and other stakeholders.

This judgement means that, in relation to quality assurance and enhancement, the college is led well, has sufficiently robust arrangements to address any identified minor weaknesses, and is likely to continue to improve the quality of its services for learners and other stakeholders.

Section B: Supporting statements

Learner progress and outcomes

The number of learners who complete their programmes successfully across all levels of provision is high and has been this way for the last three years. Almost all learners, whose destination is known, secure a positive destination through progression into employment, HE or another college programme. Almost all apprentices make good progress and attain their modern apprenticeship qualifications. The college has effective arrangements in place for safeguarding and is making good progress in discharging its duties within Corporate Parenting and PREVENT legislation. The college delivers an extensive range of vocational programmes which align very well with the needs of learners, employers and the Forth Valley economy. These programmes are vocationally relevant and provide opportunities for learners to develop skills that are required in the workplace. Learners engage very well in their college programmes and speak positively and enthusiastically about their wider college experiences. Many learners participate in volunteering, fund-raising and community projects which develop citizenship skills and promote wider achievement.

Learning and teaching processes

The college delivers a wide range of programmes that meet the needs of learners very well. Most learners are well-motivated, committed to their studies, and enthusiastic about their learning. They show independence in their learning and participate productively during lessons. Most teaching staff plan lessons effectively to include an appropriate range of activities. However, in some theory lessons, teaching approaches do not interest and motivate all learners and these learners become disengaged. Almost all teaching staff plan assessments well and take good account of learner needs to minimise assessment workload. All potential learners receive clear and helpful information about college programmes and other aspects of college life prior to commencing study. Full-time FE learners are supported well to develop and improve their essential skills and enhance their

self-confidence. Programme teams use team meetings and the *programme review* process effectively to analyse programme performance. However, most programme teams do not focus sufficiently on actions to improve learning and teaching approaches during the self-evaluation process.

Learner engagement

The college is very committed to learner engagement and is very supportive of the Student Association. Almost all full-time learners provide their views through completion of questionnaires, attendance at class representative meetings and the innovative learner-led, *Listening to Learners* initiative. The *Listening to Learners* focus groups are valued highly by almost all learners as an effective means of enabling them to influence positive change to their programmes Many learners are actively involved in planning and shaping their learning activities. Almost all class groups have a class representative, most of whom attend tailored training sessions. For those unable to attend these sessions, training is also delivered online through the virtual learning environment (VLE). The Student Association is very proactive and innovative in its approach to engaging with learners and with the college. The college involves the Student Association imaginatively in developing new approaches to learning. The student president and executive team are highly visible on all campuses and provide an effective voice for learners. The Student Association have extended their knowledge of key college functions and services through shadowing opportunities with college departments.

Leadership and Quality Culture

The college works proactively and collaboratively with an extensive range of key partners including a large range of employers, several university partners and its three neighbouring local authorities. The college's clear and well-articulated mission statement, *Making Learning Work*, aligns well with key regional and national priorities. The college has developed well-considered aims and objectives which ensure all learners have opportunities to develop skills for learning, life and work. The principal and senior managers provide strong and forward-thinking leadership. They actively promote the college's commitment to innovation, partnership and new approaches to learning. Self-evaluation arrangements are comprehensive and robust. Staff engage well in the review of programmes and services and consider learner feedback carefully to support action planning for improvement. All teaching staff are encouraged to adopt creative approaches that engage learners in their learning. However, the college recognises that more needs to be done to ensure that all teaching staff, particularly during theory lessons, use teaching approaches that motivate and engage learners fully. The college continues to perform very well, with actions taken for improving its programmes and services having a positive impact on the learner experience.

Section C: Areas of positive practice

- The number of learners who complete their programmes successfully across all levels of provision is high and has been this way for the last three years.
- Almost all learners, whose destination is known, secure a positive destination through progression into employment, HE or another college programme.
- Almost all apprentices make good progress and attain their modern apprenticeship qualifications.
- The college delivers an extensive range of vocational programmes which align very well with the needs of learners, employers and the Forth Valley economy.
- All potential learners receive clear and helpful information about college programmes and other aspects of college life prior to commencing their studies.
- Most learners are well motivated, committed to their studies and speak enthusiastically about their programmes and their wider college experiences.
- Most teaching staff plan lessons effectively to include an appropriate range of activities such as group tasks, whole class discussions and individual practical projects.
- *Learner Development Workers* support full-time FE learners well to develop and improve their essential skills and enhance their self-confidence. They provide useful pastoral guidance and support learners to set goals and reflect on their progress.
- The college is very committed to learner engagement and values learner feedback highly. Its learning strategy provides clarity to learners and staff on college expectations for learners to influence and shape their own learning.
- The Student Association is very proactive and innovative in its approach to engaging with learners and with the college. Its executive officers are represented well on a range of key college committees.
- The college involves the Student Association imaginatively in developing new approaches to learning. The *Creative Learning Action Community* (CLAC) brings together staff volunteers and learner representatives to explore the concept of creativity in learning.
- The Student Association extend their executive officers' knowledge of key college functions and services through shadowing and regular interactions with support services departments.
- The college's clear, well-articulated mission statement *Making Learning Work*, aligns well with key regional and national priorities.
- The principal and senior managers provide strong and forward-thinking leadership which conveys well the importance of the college's learning strategy.
- The college's well-considered aims and objectives ensure all learners are provided with opportunities to develop skills for learning, life and work.
- The combined curriculum and support services leadership roles undertaken by senior managers ensures support services are planned well and are integrated and aligned with curriculum delivery across the college.
- The college has a strong focus on improving learning and teaching, based on a culture that encourages creativity and innovation.
- Staff engage well in programme and services reviews. They consider learner feedback carefully to support action planning for improvement.
- The college continues to perform very well, with actions taken for improving its programmes and services having a positive impact on the learner experience.

Section D: Areas for development

- Some teaching staff, particularly during theory lessons, do not use teaching approaches that motivate and engage learners fully.
- Most programme teams do not focus sufficiently on actions to improve learning and teaching approaches during the self-evaluation process.

Section E: Main point for action

- **The college should ensure teaching approaches, particularly during theory lessons, are motivating and stimulating for all learners.**

4. How well are learners progressing and achieving relevant, high quality outcomes?

How effective is the college at achieving and maintaining high levels of retention, attainment and progression?

Early withdrawal rates and further withdrawal rates on full and part-time FE and HE programmes are better than the national sector performance level and have been for the last three years overall.

Completed successful outcome rates across all levels of provision are high. On full-time FE programmes the rates are 70% which is six percentage points better than the national sector performance level. They have been at or around this level for the last three years.

Completed successful outcome rates on full-time HE programmes are 78% which is seven percentage points better than the national sector performance level with a significant improvement in academic session 2014-15. Completed successful outcome rates on part-time programmes are very high. On FE programmes they are at 91% which is 15 percentage points above the national sector performance level and have been this way for the last three years. On HE programmes, they are at 89% which is 11 percentage points above the national sector performance level and have also been around this level for the last three years.

During the period 2013-15, over 90% of full-time learners gained employment, progressed onto another college programme or enrolled with a university. Almost all apprentices make good progress and attain their modern apprenticeship qualifications.

Adherence to statutory principles

The college has effective arrangements in place for its safeguarding duties and ensures all college staff are registered with the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) scheme. The college is making good progress in discharging its duties within Corporate Parenting and PREVENT legislation. Through the *Protect, Prevent, Parent* initiative, widely promoted to staff, the college outlines its approach clearly for compliance with these responsibilities.

The college has built well on experience gained with their award for the Buttle UK Quality Mark, to inform emerging Corporate Parenting arrangements. It is working closely with representatives from its three neighbouring local authorities to develop a Corporate Parenting Plan, informed by Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland guidelines. Targeted training has been delivered to senior managers and front-line staff in respect of the college's duty under the government's PREVENT strategy. College staff are increasingly aware of their responsibilities for PREVENT and there are plans to roll out further *Workshops to Raise Awareness of PREVENT* (WRAP) training to all staff and the Student Association. Online WRAP training also forms part of induction for new staff.

How well do programmes and services meet learners' needs?

The college delivers an extensive range of vocational programmes which align well with the needs of learners, employers and the Forth Valley economy. Most programmes include work experience and are vocationally relevant, which helps learners to develop relevant skills for the workplace. Annual *curriculum reviews* ensure currency of provision and on-going relevance of the curriculum portfolio.

Full-time FE programmes at SCQF levels 1-6, are distributed well across the three college campuses, enabling learners to enrol on programmes which are easily accessible. Through the SCOTS initiative, partially funded by the local authorities, the college supports 240 S4 learners at risk of not progressing onto a positive destination to undertake college study. This programme of vocational taster sessions helps learners to build confidence, develop motivation and make informed choices, and includes a Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Employability Award.

The college's wide and extensive curriculum offer, including access-level provision without formal entry requirements, supports many learners to progress internally. Close partnership working between admissions staff and curriculum managers, supported by well-designed admissions processes, ensures that learners are placed on programmes that are appropriate to their interests and ability levels. The college provides school staff with good access to real-time admissions information through the *data sharing portal*, ensuring that learners who are unsuccessful in obtaining a college place are identified early and provided with alternative options.

The college has clear and comprehensive arrangements to incorporate essential skills development within programmes. The Core and Essential Skills team have developed a wide range of integrated, contextualised projects suitable for learners to develop their skills. The *Skills-Builder* project is one such example which ensures learners in engineering achieve the core skills of problem solving and working with others in a relevant and engaging activity.

Learners engage well with their studies and learner satisfaction with college programmes is very high.

How well do learners make progress, attain qualifications and achieve more widely?

Almost all learners successfully achieve a relevant qualification and their personal goals. However, learner success rates in a few part-time programmes are low. Almost all learners, whose destination is known, secure a positive destination through progression into employment, HE or another college programme. In addition to gaining certificated qualifications, learners benefit from a wide variety of educational experiences including work experience placements, guest speaker presentations, visits to employers or places of local interest, mock-interviews, live-client briefs, volunteering activities and competition entries.

Many learners gain additional certificates and awards including computing vendor qualifications, sports fitness awards and Open Badges, which are online badges that recognise other skills and achievements. Some learners also succeed when entering local and national competitions. For example, stonemasonry learners attained silver

and bronze medals at the UK Construction Industry Training Board SkillBuild championship and hospitality learners gained recognition in the annual UK Young Restaurant Team of the Year competition.

Almost all learners attain core skills in numeracy, communication and information technology. Successful completion rates for these core skills have been high for the last three years. Many learners participate in volunteering, fund-raising and community projects which develop their citizenship skills and promote wider achievement.

5. How effective are the college's learning and teaching processes?

How well does the college design and deliver programmes and services to meet the needs of learners from all backgrounds and circumstances?

The college delivers a wide range of programmes that meet the needs of learners, employers and communities very well. The curriculum portfolio matches closely the workforce requirements of local employers. The college delivers a range of appropriate provision, across its three campuses, for learners with additional support needs. Staff in most programme teams demonstrate flexibility in adapting lessons to meet the needs of specific groups of learners. These learners benefit from individualised, personal learning support plans and access to assistive technology, which encourages and supports their learning.

The college provides clear direction for the promotion of equality and diversity. In many curriculum areas the promotion of diversity is embedded effectively within programme design and overall, learning and teaching activities take good account of equality and diversity themes. For example, in sport programmes teaching staff use live projects well to raise awareness of equality and diversity topics and tackle issues such as sectarianism.

How well do learners learn?

Most learners are well-motivated, committed to their studies and enthusiastic about their learning. In almost all lessons, learners interact productively with each other and with teaching staff. The positive relationships between staff and learners contribute to a constructive and supportive climate for learning. Learners use well a range of good quality resources to support their learning, particularly during practical lessons where they have access to high quality and well-equipped facilities.

Almost all learners use the college VLE proficiently to access learning resources and reflect on their learning goals using *ilearn*. They use laptops, smartphones and tablets to develop independent learning skills and support their studies. Learners use information and communications technology effectively to support their understanding and enhance their learning outcomes.

Almost all learners participate positively during lessons to develop their personal and learning skills and acquire subject knowledge. They show independence in their learning and work effectively both as individuals and with their peers during group tasks. In many subject areas, learners engage productively in peer review activities to scrutinise and provide feedback on each other's work. However, some learners, particularly in theory lessons, do not engage fully with their learning activities.

How well do planning, teaching and the use of resources ensure effective learning?

Most teaching staff plan lessons effectively to include an appropriate range of activities such as group tasks, whole class discussions and individual practical projects. They use resources well to incorporate appropriate learning and teaching approaches to engage learners. However, not all teaching staff involve learners sufficiently in the

planning of lesson activities. Almost all teaching staff use their relevant professional and industrial experience well to plan lessons that incorporate employability skills and industry standards.

In most lessons, teaching staff use an appropriate range of teaching approaches to make learning interesting and check learners' understanding. Many staff incorporate online delivery using the college VLE or work creatively and collaboratively with other subject areas to design projects which motivate and enthuse learners. However, in some theory lessons, teaching staff do not apply sufficiently interesting approaches and a few learners become disengaged.

Very positive and respectful relationships between learners and staff provide an open and supportive environment for learning which promotes learner confidence and self esteem.

New campuses in Alloa and Stirling provide high-quality accommodation and facilities, which significantly enhance the learning experience. In Falkirk, there is also a good range of industry standard equipment and workshop facilities.

Almost all staff promote high standards during learning activities, particularly in relation to health and safety. However, in a few lessons, the late arrival of learners is not routinely challenged and disrupts the learning experience of others.

How well is assessment used to promote effective learning?

Almost all teaching staff plan assessments well and take good account of learner needs to minimise assessment workload. Learners are well-informed about assessment schedules and they are able to negotiate adjustments to submission deadlines, where appropriate, for their individual needs and circumstances. Almost all teaching staff provide learners with regular and detailed feedback on both written and practical assessments. In a few subject areas, online assessment is used well and these learners benefit from prompt feedback on their performance.

Almost all learners are clear on their progress and on what they need to do to improve. Most teaching staff make good use of questioning techniques to check learner understanding and progress during lessons. Many staff use learner peer review effectively to support learners with reflection on their progress and the work of others. For example, in beauty therapy and sport programmes, learners regularly provide feedback on each other's performance during tasks and practical activities.

The college has appropriate assessment arrangements in place for learners with additional support needs. Teaching staff make reasonable adjustments to assessment methodologies and deadlines to accommodate learners' individual needs and circumstances.

How well are potential and current learners provided with information, advice and support?

All potential learners receive clear and helpful information about college programmes and other aspects of college life prior to commencing their studies. The college promotes programmes clearly to potential learners, parents and caregivers through a

well-designed website, school liaison visits and college information days. All learners are aware of and have easy access to a comprehensive range of services to support their learning on all campuses.

Learner Development Workers support full-time FE learners well to develop and improve their essential skills and enhance their self-confidence. They provide useful pastoral guidance and support learners to set goals and reflect on their progress. In addition, they support learners to complete Personal Learning Plans which track improvements in employability and essential skills.

Almost all learners make good use of a variety of formal and informal curricular and vocational guidance opportunities. Staff use scheduled guidance time effectively to provide appropriate pastoral support for FE learners and to monitor their skills development.

The college has effective referral arrangements in place to ensure all learners receive the specialist help required to overcome barriers to learning. *Learning Development Facilitators* work closely with teaching staff to identify learners with additional needs promptly and ensure they benefit from provision of appropriate and tailored support.

However, the *ilearn* activities designed to support learners on the college VLE, do not always link well to learners' programme content or prior learning. As a result, many learners become disengaged when using this resource.

How well does the college sustain continuous enhancement of learning and teaching through self-evaluation and internal review activities?

The college uses *Listening to Learners* focus groups regularly and effectively to gather feedback from learners. Teaching staff and college managers make good use of information provided to inform *programme reviews* and the evaluation of support services. Teaching staff meet routinely in teams to discuss programme delivery, identify how to improve the learner experience and to address issues affecting learner retention and attainment. Programme teams consider carefully performance indicator data and take good account of feedback from learners and employers. They use the *programme review* process effectively to analyse performance, and make appropriate changes to programme content and delivery. Action-planning for improvement in under-performing programmes is mostly effective.

Almost all teaching staff discuss their classroom practice informally with their colleagues and share ideas for improving teaching practice. Some staff have participated in peer observation of learning and teaching and are enthusiastic about the opportunity to learn from other practitioners and develop their skills. The majority of teaching staff reflect on their learning and teaching practice. However, most programme teams do not focus sufficiently on actions to improve learning and teaching approaches during the self-evaluation process.

6. How well are learners engaged in enhancing their own learning and the work and life of the college?

How well do learners engage in enhancing their own learning?

Forth Valley College is very committed to learner engagement and values learner feedback highly. Its strategic plan and learning strategy, *Empowering Learners*, provides clarity to learners and staff on college expectations for learners to influence and shape their own learning. As a result, almost all full-time learners regularly provide feedback and offer views on their college experiences. The innovative learner-led *Listening to Learners* focus groups, combined with regular questionnaires and suggestions from class representatives, provide staff with valuable learner feedback. Teaching and support staff use this feedback well to make appropriate adjustments to programme delivery and support services. For example, feedback from *Listening to Learners* and the Student Council identified a lack of progression information for NC learners. This resulted in a successful initiative conducted by the Student Association, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and college support staff to increase learners' awareness of their post-college options. *Listening to Learners* focus groups are valued highly by almost all learners and are seen as an effective means to influence positive change. Learners appreciate prompt and positive feedback received in response to issues raised.

The majority of learners are involved in planning and shaping learning activities, including the selection of learning resources used in their lessons. Learners take opportunities to enhance their learning experiences through a choice of project and research topics. Most learners are able to discuss their assessment schedules and these are often adapted to suit individual or class needs.

All learners are confident about raising issues directly with staff and are sure that any concerns will be addressed. Almost all class groups have a class representative. Almost all learners are aware of the role of their class representative in raising issues and achieving positive change. Most class representatives engage positively in tailored class representative training sessions. For those unable to attend these sessions, training is also delivered online through the VLE. Learners on supported learning programmes benefit from bespoke whole class training, which supports them well to capture and convey the views of their peers.

How well do learners engage in enhancing the work and life of the college?

The Student Association is very proactive and innovative in its approach to engaging with learners. Executive officers are represented well on a range of key college committees including the Board of Management and its Strategic Development Committee. The Student Association is very well supported by the college and they engage effectively with the principal and college managers. The contribution of the Student Association is valued highly by the Board and college management, and as a result, learners have a significant influence on decision-making processes.

The college involves the Student Association imaginatively in developing new approaches to learning. The cross-college CLAC brings together staff volunteers and learner representatives to explore the concept of creativity in learning. One innovative outcome of this initiative was the student president delivering a training session for

teaching staff on the types of learning and teaching approaches that work well for learners. Additionally the Student Association and college VLE development team work collaboratively to engage learners in the creation of learning resources. This includes the *stoodle* project which supports learners to become *student teachers* using uploaded video clips and practical demonstrations to support fellow learners. The Student Association also lead a partnership project with college staff to offer the Scotland's Mental Health First Aid programme. This programme raises awareness of mental health issues and helps learners develop confidence to approach peers who are having difficulty coping with their studies.

The majority of class representatives attend bi-annual Student Council meetings to raise and discuss any cross-college concerns. These meetings are chaired by the student president and attended by members of the senior management team. The college responds quickly and effectively to concerns raised by learners and improvement actions from the meetings are communicated using the *You Said We Did* publication.

The Student Association pro-actively promotes its services and events through their *Fusion* blog site and social media. Almost all full-time learners are aware of the Student Association and have a basic understanding of its role. The student president and executive are highly visible on all campuses. They use colourful pull-up banners to good effect to inform learners of their presence on each of the three campuses. The Student Association officers have close links with most curriculum areas and use these links well to plan jointly a broad range of creative volunteering projects and events. These are valuable activities that enable learners to further develop their citizenship and employability skills.

The Student Association promotes effectively the issues of sustainability, environmental awareness and health and wellbeing to learners through well-planned and imaginative events, often delivered in partnership with external agencies. It also works collaboratively with the local Credit Union to make their services accessible to learners.

The Student Association has extended their executive officers' knowledge of key college functions and services through shadowing and regular interactions with support service departments. This has enabled the Student Association to provide consistent and accurate advice to learners with regard to, for example, bursary and hardship funding. The Student Association has developed an effective process for rewarding and incentivising the valuable contribution learners make through volunteering activities. Learners' contributions as class representatives and volunteers are recognised through the *Open Badges* award scheme.

The Student Association is pro-active in arranging volunteering and charity events. Examples include: English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners supporting a homeless project with 'Walk a Mile in My Shoes' event and a 'Swishing' event in Falkirk campus successfully encouraging learners to donate and exchange unwanted clothing and jewellery. Through these activities learners raise significant amounts of money for a range of charitable causes.

7. How well is the college led and how well is it enhancing the quality of its services for learners and other stakeholders?

The Board of Management, principal and senior team have a clear, well-articulated mission statement *Making Learning Work*, that aligns well with key regional and national priorities. The mission and underpinning strategies are informed well by Scottish Government priorities including Developing the Young Workforce (DYW), SFC Forth Valley Regional Outcome Agreement and the SDS Forth Valley Regional Skills Assessment. The college has developed well-considered aims and objectives, supported by clear and comprehensive operational planning arrangements. These aims and objectives ensure learners develop the four capacities outlined within Curriculum for Excellence and provide opportunities to develop their skills for learning, life and work.

The principal and senior managers provide strong and forward-thinking leadership which conveys the importance of the college's learning strategy to staff. They actively promote the college's commitment to innovation, creative learning and partnership working. Staff feel they are consulted and their opinions are valued. Almost all staff understand well the aims of *Making Learning Work* and these feature prominently within all departmental operational plans, operational targets and resultant actions.

The *Forth Valley College Curriculum Strategy Road Map* provides a clear, well-articulated vision for a curriculum offer organised around distinct local area characteristics. Effective estate planning, alongside carefully planned curriculum distribution, ensures learners can easily access a wide range of vocational provision across the college's three campuses. Associate principals carry out well their substantial responsibility for enhancing quality and maintaining an effective quality culture. Their remits are intentionally balanced across support and curriculum functions and this arrangement provides a consistent and collaborative leadership approach across all campuses. As an early adopter of DYW, the college has, in conjunction with its local authorities and industry and national agency partners, realigned its school-college portfolio successfully to ensure it maximises opportunities to fulfil DYW aims and objectives.

The college encourages teaching staff to adopt creative and engaging approaches to learning through the CLAC project. This includes an innovative intranet based video repository (*Grapevine*) which hosts short video clips to support improvements in learning and teaching. Many teaching staff have engaged well with this project. However, some teaching staff have not become involved with the aims of the CLAC initiative. The college is aware of this and will support teaching staff participation as the project rolls out over the next few years. Most teaching staff benefit from a wide range of continuing professional development opportunities. Staff development for teaching and support staff is focused clearly on learner needs and college priorities. Staff without a teaching qualification are supported by the college to undertake Professional Development Awards and the Teaching Qualification in Further Education within a reasonable timescale.

The combined curriculum and support services leadership role of senior managers ensures that support services are planned well and are integrated fully with curriculum delivery across the college. Support team managers work very closely and effectively with curriculum managers and also with the Student Association to ensure that learners

are at the centre of self-evaluation and improvement planning for support services. Learners are provided with easy access to a wide range of external, specialist support agencies.

The college has a strong focus on improving learning and teaching, based on a culture that encourages creativity and innovation. Curriculum and support team managers lead and manage their areas of responsibility well, ensuring that enhancements to learner experiences are identified, implemented quickly and monitored regularly. Curriculum managers and teaching staff engage actively and positively in curriculum planning and review. The annual two-day *Curriculum Review Conference* provides an effective environment in which staff can evaluate and revise provision, identify ways of improving performance and share good practice. However, the college recognises that more needs to be done to ensure that all teaching staff, particularly during theory lessons, use teaching approaches that motivate and engage learners fully.

Programme self-evaluation arrangements are comprehensive and robust. Most staff engage positively with internal review and evaluation of their programmes and make good use of learner feedback and employers' comments. The college's Quality Team provide helpful feedback, support and challenge on programme self-evaluation reports. Programme teams also carry out effective annual reviews of their programmes which ensures underlying performance issues are addressed promptly.

The college has developed a voluntary peer observation model for teaching staff who wish to develop and extend innovative practice for learning and teaching. Most teaching staff welcome this initiative and engage collaboratively with their peers to reflect on their learning and teaching approaches. However, this initiative has still to be fully embedded across all teaching departments.

The College won an Association of Colleges Beacon Award for Innovation in Further Education 2014-2015. It has also won and been shortlisted for several other national awards for the quality of its provision and its approach to innovation, employer engagement and its work with apprentices.

The college continues to perform very well, with actions taken for improving its provision having a positive impact on the learner experience.

8. How extensive and effective are college partnerships with communities, other learning providers, employers and agencies?

The college works proactively and collaboratively with an extensive range of key partners including Community Planning Partnerships, local businesses, schools, universities, and national and international employers. These partnerships support well the college's commitment to the development of a qualified workforce which meets the needs of business and industry. Local authority workforce development needs are considered carefully by college managers when planning curriculum changes and future developments. Through close planning and collaboration with employer partners, the college has developed bespoke facilities and programme content to meet industry and business needs for specialist skills. Examples include an integrated training facility for the growing facilities management sector, bespoke training for apprentices in the restoration of historically significant buildings and an outdoor overhead power line training facility, where trainees can experience the challenge of real-life working conditions.

Through active membership of Local Employability Partnerships, the college has developed close, effective links with its three neighbouring local authorities. This ensures that college programmes and services are accessible to school-aged learners. The college leads on the development of senior-phase vocational pathways and Foundation Apprenticeships, continuing to strengthen school-college partnerships across the region. Currently, over 700 school-aged learners from 18 local secondary schools benefit from attendance on a wide range of school-college programmes, including HNC provision, with many of these learners progressing onto full-time college programmes.

Employers speak very positively and enthusiastically of college programmes and services. Many have worked with the college over a number of years and view the college as being a key contributor to their success. Through this close collaboration, the college has expanded its modern apprenticeship programme to over 1,000 registered apprentices, mostly in the field of engineering. Curriculum teams work in close partnership with a wide range of employers and have a strong focus on providing relevant and up-to-date training provision. Through partnership with industry, the college has installed specialist plant and technologies for the oil, gas and chemicals sectors to provide high quality, industry standard training facilities.

The college works collaboratively with a large range of university partners. Through well-established articulation agreements which support learners to progress onto HE provision, there are currently 219 learners undertaking four integrated degree programmes with the University of Stirling. In addition, the college delivers two separate *Associate Student* programmes with Heriot Watt and Strathclyde Universities, as well as two further University of Stirling validated degree programmes.

9. Signposting excellent practice

During the Education Scotland external review, the college submitted examples of what it considered to be excellent practice and the review team also identified examples worthy of dissemination.

9.1 Supporting Transition to Positive Destinations for School Leavers Through Effective Data Sharing

Working in partnership with Falkirk Council Children's Services, the college has made significant improvements to transition planning arrangements for school pupils in the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence. The schools *data sharing portal* supports partners to track, manage and support transition to college programmes by providing direct access to real-time information about the application process for each pupil. The portal allows staff in schools, the local authority, and SDS to identify pupils who have applied for college programmes, and track individual learner progress through each stage of the application process. School staff are enabled to react quickly and provide tailored support for individual pupils in, for example, preparing for interviews, arranging release from school, planning travel to college, attending interviews, or achieving entry conditions. In turn, any pupils who have been unsuccessful in obtaining a college place are identified much earlier than previously. This enables school staff to provide targeted assistance and support pupils to identify an alternative positive destination. All partners are very appreciative of the improved access to data and describe how the transition process is now much more transparent and seamless. Greater analysis of data by both the college and local authority is helping partners to identify trends and support joint planning arrangements for sharing of good practice between schools. The college has also identified those programmes where school pupils are less successful in obtaining a place. This has enabled the college to review recruitment processes for these programmes and remove any unintended barriers to access. Plans are in place to introduce this service across the other local authorities with which the college works.

9.2 Creative Learning Action Community (CLAC)

In line with its mission statement *Making Learning Work*, Forth Valley College staff and learners have a strong focus on developing innovative approaches to learning and teaching across all curriculum areas. There is a particularly strong emphasis on using creativity skills to move learning and teaching forward.

In order to emphasise its strategic importance, this initiative is being led by the Creative Learning Leadership Group chaired by the principal. The college formed a cross college CLAC with thirty staff volunteers and learner representatives who came together to explore the concept of creativity. They identified opportunities for creative approaches to learning and highlighted the barriers that prevent staff and learners being creative. The work started by identifying staff members with the right portfolio of creativity skills who could act as facilitators, mentors and champions of creative learning. A group of creative arts staff, worked with their peers to enable them to explore new ideas. They used well-established techniques for generating ideas and exploring and testing concepts, based on their experience of film-making, drama and visual arts. This open-ended, inventive approach resulted in the generation of many interesting ideas for enhancing learning and teaching.

A particularly strong aspect was the emergence of the theme of collaboration between departments and very different subject areas. This focus on interdisciplinary learning has been particularly successful in terms of stimulating curiosity and widening peer learning networks, amongst both staff and learners. In one example, learners studying construction and make-up artistry worked together on a health and safety project. The construction learners focused on typical work-place scenarios and the make-up artists replicated serious work-based injuries. This made the learning on health and safety very real and provided the make-up learners with a challenging and rigorous project. The communication and discussions between learners, supervised by staff, ensured that each group completed the project with a much stronger understanding of each other's work.

Within the college, an increasing number of collaborations across departments are developing, with the on-going support of mentors. This is becoming a strong and successful learning and teaching theme within the college, with many projects transferable across subject areas. There is evidence within the college that as a result of this collaborative approach learner motivation, sense of empowerment and unit achievement on the programmes involved has significantly increased**.**

9.3   Learner Engagement 'Listening to Learners'

In response to learner feedback, the college has extended its approaches to engaging learners in evaluating their learning experiences. The college has set up *Listening to Learners* focus groups, held twice each year, with all members of each class to replace class representatives attending *programme review* meetings. This has greatly expanded the number of learners who are able to present their views directly to teaching staff and managers in a formal, recorded way. Over the past years, this has enabled the college to engage with over 2,500 learners each year through approximately 270 focus groups. A key and innovative aspect of this process is that it is facilitated by class representatives. Many have benefited from specific training in facilitating meetings as part of class representative training.

The college has designed the *Listening to Learners* focus groups in order to gather detailed feedback about the quality of the learning experience. The template for recording the focus group feedback is based on key strands of the college's learning strategy *Empowering Learners*. During class representative training, there is an opportunity for these learners to influence its language and layout to ensure that they feel confident about using it with their peers.

The focus groups generate very detailed and specific information about learners' views on their learning. The face-to-face nature of the focus groups and the allocation of an appropriate amount of time for discussions means that issues are explored in depth, which is not always possible in formal meetings or through use of surveys. Class representatives have a strong sense of ownership of the process and many feel enabled to propose solutions to issues, rather than just raise them. There is also strong, collaborative partnership working between class representatives and curriculum managers who ensure that issues are discussed by programme teams and any actions fed back to learners promptly. *Listening to Learners* has generated many examples of improvements at programme level including programme design, learning and teaching, resources, assessment and learner support. *Listening to Learners* feedback is also analysed at college level to identify any patterns or trends that would benefit from more

strategic action. As a result of this process, learners across the college feel confident that their views are gathered systematically and that the college takes them seriously.

10. What is an overarching judgement?

Education Scotland uses an overarching judgement of *Effectiveness* to express the findings of the review team. The judgement of effectiveness takes into account all the evidence gathered through the external review. Such judgements express outcomes as:

effective;
limited effectiveness; or
not effective.

This judgement is further detailed by supporting statements which substantiate the judgement of effectiveness. Education Scotland evaluates and reports according to the three key principles. In this report, the principles and supporting statements relate to:

Key principle 1 – High quality learning (supporting statements numbers 1 and 2)

Key principle 2 – Learner engagement (supporting statement number 3)

Key principle 3 – Quality culture (supporting statement number 4)

Judgements of effectiveness and supporting statements provide stakeholders with assurances, or otherwise, about the quality of a college's provision. These judgements are based on trends and track record of a college, the findings at the time of the external review, and the college's capacity to continue improving.

A judgement of *effective* indicates that the college has in place **effective** arrangements to maintain and enhance the quality of its provision and outcomes for learners and other stakeholders. This judgement means that, in relation to quality assurance and enhancement, the college is led well, has sufficiently robust arrangements to address any minor weakness, and is likely to continue to improve the quality of its services for learners and other stakeholders.

A judgement of *limited effectiveness* indicates that the effectiveness of the college's arrangements to maintain and enhance the quality of its provision and outcomes for learners and other stakeholders is **limited**. This judgement means that there are some strengths in the college's arrangements for quality enhancement. However, there are weaknesses in arrangements for *high quality learning* and/or le*arner engagement* and/or *quality culture*. If not addressed, the importance of these weaknesses will continue to **limit the effectiveness** of the college's arrangements.

A judgement of *not effective* indicates that the college's arrangements to maintain and enhance the quality of its provision and outcomes for learners and other stakeholders are **not effective**. This judgement means that there are significant weaknesses in the arrangements for *high quality learning* and/or l*earner engagement* and/or *quality culture*. There is a high probability that, without significant and comprehensive action, with external monitoring and support, the college will fail to improve current low-quality provision and outcomes to an acceptable level. Education Scotland does not have evidence that the college has the capacity and commitment to identify and implement effective and comprehensive action.

Scottish Funding Council response to judgements

If the overarching judgement is **effective**, the Council will expect the college to engage with Education Scotland in follow-up activity, as appropriate, and, one year after the publication of the review reports, to provide a report, endorsed by its governing body (see *Council guidance to colleges on quality from August 2012*, paragraphs 62-66 SFC/13/2012 setting out its response to the review.)

If the overarching judgement is of **limited effectiveness** or is **not effective**, the Council will require the institution to prepare and fulfil an action plan to address the shortcomings identified (see paragraph 67 of guidance). Education Scotland will provide advice to SFC on the adequacy of the action plan and on how it is being implemented. SFC, taking into account any advice from Education Scotland, will normally require a formal follow-up review at an appropriate time, usually within no more than two years.

11.   What happens next?

Education Scotland will continue to monitor progress during annual engagement visits to the college.

There will be feedback to the learners at the college.

One year on from this report, the college will produce a report setting out what it has done to address the main points for action and/or areas for development in the report and other quality assurance and enhancement activities. There will be a link to this report from Education Scotland's website.

Ian P Beach
HM Inspector

12. Further information

The review and judgements relate to the college as a whole and do not provide information about individual programmes of study or subjects. For further information on these or any other queries, contact the college or look on its website - http://www.forthvalley.ac.uk/

For further information about Education Scotland, the external review methodologies, or other information about reviews, see www.educationscotland.gov.uk

For further information about the Scottish Funding Council, see –   www.sfc.ac.uk

13.   How can you contact us?

This report has been produced as a web-only publication and is available on our website at
http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/othersectors/collegere views/ForthValleyCollege.asp

If you would like to receive this report in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on 0131 244 5684.

If you want to give us feedback or make a complaint about our work, please contact us by telephone on 0131 244 4330, or e-mail: complaints@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk or write to us addressing your letter to The Complaints Manager, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Livingston, EH54 6GA.

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http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/FEReadabilitysurvey130612_tcm4-719342.doc

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Appendix 1

Glossary of terms

CLAC	Creative Learning Action Community
DYW	Developing the Young Workforce
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
HNC	Higher National Certificate
NC	National Certificate
PVG	Protection of Vulnerable Groups
QI	Quality Indicator
SCOTS	School College Opportunities to Succeed
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SDS	Skills Development Scotland
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
WRAP	Workshops to raise Awareness of Prevent

Appendix 2

THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

This Framework diagram has been produced to show the mainstream Scottish qualifications already credit rated by SQA and HEIs. However, there are a diverse number of learning programmes on the Framework, which, due to the limitations of this format, cannot be represented here. For more information, please visit the SCQF website at www.scqf.org.uk to view the interactive version of the Framework or search the Database.

scqf
scottish credit and
qualifications framework

SCQF Levels	SQA Qualifications				Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions	SVQs/MAs
12	Some SQA qualifications are changing between 2013-2016. See www.sqa.org.uk/readyreckoner				Doctoral Degree	Professional Apprenticeship
11					Masters Degree, Integrated Masters Degree, Post Graduate Diploma, Post Graduate Certificate	Professional Apprenticeship SVQ 5
10					Honours Degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate	Professional Apprenticeship
9			Professional Development Award		Bachelors / Ordinary Degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate	Technical Apprenticeship SVQ 4
8		Higher National Diploma			Diploma Of Higher Education	Technical Apprenticeship SVQ 4
7	Advanced Higher Scottish Baccalaureate	Higher National Certificate			Certificate Of Higher Education	Modern Apprenticeship SVQ 3
6	Higher					Modern Apprenticeship SVQ 3
5	National 5 Intermediate 2					Modern Apprenticeship SVQ 2
4	National 4 Intermediate 1	National Certificate	National Progression Award			SVQ 1
3	National 3 Access 3					
2	National 2 Access 2					
1	National 1 Access 1					