Item 9a

LEVEL OF ASSURANCE
Good

Glasgow Kelvin College

Student Support

Internal Audit report No: 2022/02

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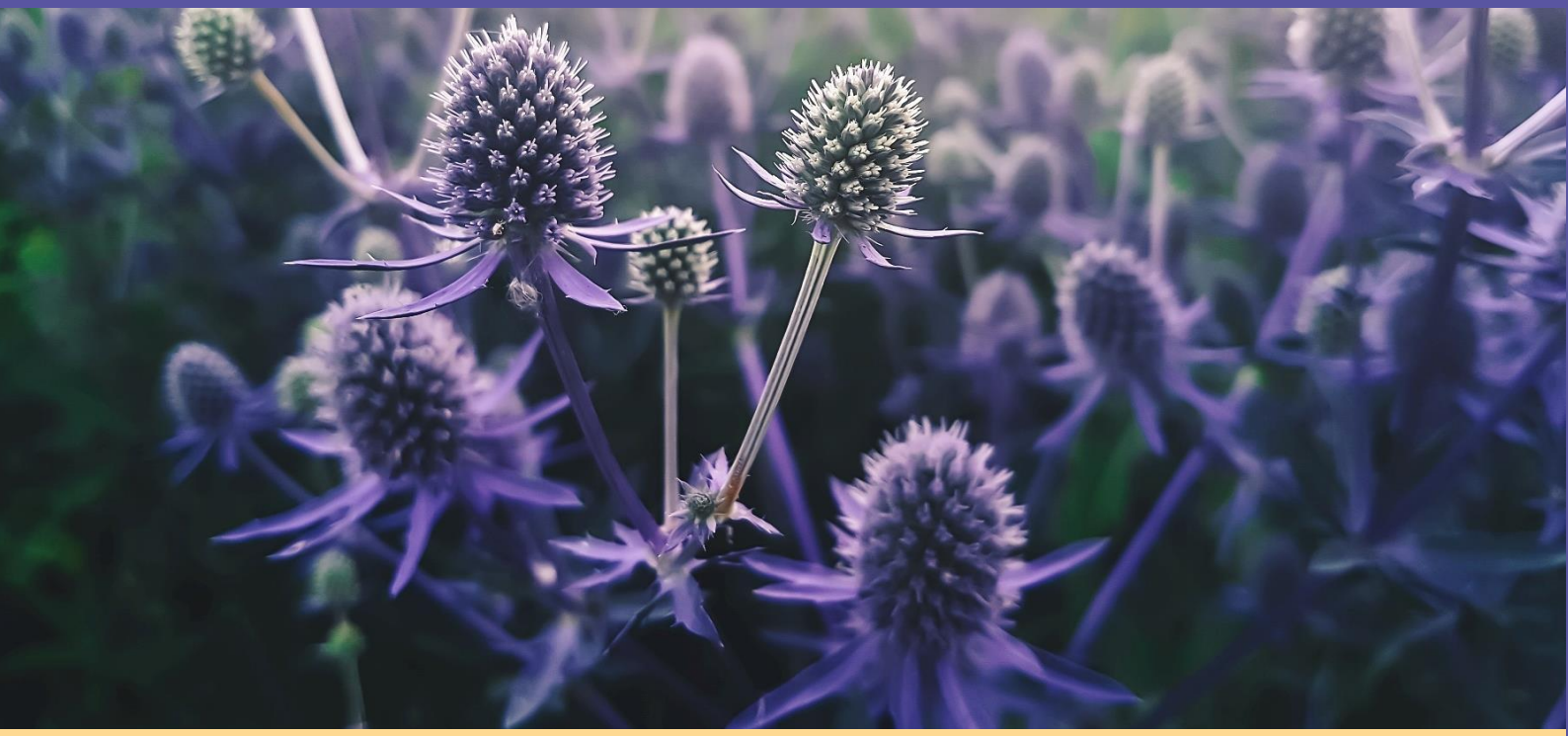

Henderson Loggie

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Level of Assurance

In addition to the grading of individual recommendations in the action plan, audit findings are assessed and graded on an overall basis to denote the level of assurance that can be taken from the report. Risk and materiality levels are considered in the assessment and grading process as well as the general quality of the procedures in place.

Gradings are defined as follows:

Good	System meets control objectives.
Satisfactory	System meets control objectives with some weaknesses present.
Requires improvement	System has weaknesses that could prevent it achieving control objectives.
Unacceptable	System cannot meet control objectives.

Action Grades

Priority 1	Issue subjecting the organisation to material risk and which requires to be brought to the attention of management and the Audit and Risk Committee.
Priority 2	Issue subjecting the organisation to significant risk and which should be addressed by management.
Priority 3	Matters subjecting the organisation to minor risk or which, if addressed, will enhance efficiency and effectiveness.

Management Summary

Overall Level of Assurance

Good	System meets control objectives.

Risk Assessment

This review focused on the controls in place to mitigate the following risk on the Glasgow Kelvin College ('the College') Strategic Risk Register:

- Learners are not appropriately supported during their enrolment or their course of study, the College fails to retain sufficient numbers or they fail to make sufficient progress. Increased levels of poor mental health during pandemic as advised by Scottish Government. Risk may result in claims for failure to educate/support. Again resulting in reputational damage and perception of the College as a desirable place to study (risk rating: amber)

Background

As part of the Internal Audit programme at the College for 2021/22, we carried out a review of the organisation's student support arrangements. Our Audit Needs Assessment identified this as an area where risk can arise and where Internal Audit can assist in providing assurances to the Principal and the Audit and Risk Committee that the related control environment is operating effectively, ensuring risk is maintained at an acceptable level.

Satisfactory student experience, as well as ensuring teaching activity targets are met by the College, has been identified by management as one of the key mitigating actions for the strategic risk of failure to reduce the College cost base on a managed basis to meet the requirements of the three-year financial forecast. Taking reasonable steps to ensure that wellbeing, financial and academic support is available to students is therefore crucial in achieving the strategic aims of the College.

When seeking support, students can access three main services – Advice and Guidance, Learner Support, and Counselling and Wellbeing. A recent reorganisation has brought these three teams together with Library Services and Learning Engagement and Student Association to create single service hubs at each of the three main campus sites. The newly aligned service reports into the Head of Student Support Services. Together with curriculum staff and the College's Student Association, students can be directed to these teams or wider support teams such as the Funding Team who support the funding application and eligibility process, onsite mental health and counselling services, ICT, library services, as well as other external partnership organisations or charities.

Board responsibilities for oversight are delegated to the Learning and Teaching Committee which receives regular updates on student support services from the Head of Student Support Services.

We reviewed the way in which this framework of support has adapted to the changing support needs of students during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Scope, Objectives and Overall Findings

The audit reviewed the support services available to students, concentrating on the role of Advice, Guidance and Learning Support staff. The overall objective of our audit was to obtain reasonable assurance that there is appropriate provision of adequate advice and support to new students, students experiencing financial or other hardship and students with disabilities or additional learning needs.

The table below notes the objectives for this review and records the results:

Objective	Findings			
To ensure that there are processes and controls in place to be reasonably assured that students are:		1	2	3
		No. of Agreed Actions		
1. Orientated appropriately at the beginning of the year.	**Good**	-	-	-
2. Identified and provided with support if struggling financially.	**Good**	-	-	-
3. Identified and provided with support if struggling academically.	**Good**	-	-	-
4. Given adequate support if they have a disability.	**Good**	-	-	-
5. Made to feel part of the College community.	**Good**	-	-	-
Overall Level of Assurance	**Good**	-	-	-
		System meets control objectives.		

Audit Approach

We assessed whether the above objectives have been met through discussion with the Head of Student Services, as well as the managers and staff in the Advice, Guidance and Learning Support teams, and discussion a Student President of the Student Association, and review of relevant documentation.

Summary of Main Findings

Strengths

- Work is being progressed within the College to support the student experience and deliver positive outcomes in the learning environment. The COVID-19 pandemic has required staff to adapt their delivery of academic content online and support staff have implemented new ways to orientate students at induction and support their enrolment into the College community;
- Student enrolment and induction ultimately remained unchanged. Ensuring staff and student safety during the pandemic has been prioritised, with processes around enrolment and induction that traditionally required face to face meetings were adapted to be hosted online;
- Student support services and the Students' Association have worked closely to align their schedule of activities to coincide with key events and ensuring messaging around support is consistent;
- Partnership working has also continued ensuring that individuals, such as students who are Care Experienced get the support they need from application;
- Funding options for individuals experiencing hardship and digital exclusion are established, and the College has utilised SFC funding to make available laptops and Wi-Fi dongles to students in need of access to IT equipment;
- Academic review of attendance and student engagement also allows students to be identified who are struggling academically. Through class tutors, study plans are developed, or the student can be referred to Learning Support for additional support needs;
- Despite national COVID-19 restrictions, all student support services have remained open, both remotely and with an 'on campus' presence, albeit at a reduced level;
- The College has ensured there is online guidance around wellbeing and access to Library Services for students who cannot study from home. Access to other support teams, such as Advice, Guidance, Learner Support, counselling and wellbeing support has also been maintained;
- There is regular oversight of student support service arrangements by the Learning and Teaching Committee; and
- The Student Advice, Guidance and Learner Support teams being brought together into a single service located alongside the Library Service. This integrated approach will improve information sharing and provide students with a more efficient support service.

Weaknesses

No significant weaknesses were identified during our review.

Acknowledgment

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff at the College who helped us during our review.

Main Findings

Objective 1: There are processes and controls in place to be reasonably assured that students are orientated appropriately at the beginning of the year.

The College has an Admissions Policy, which was last updated in March 2021. The policy is underpinned by the College's codes of practice and policies on Equality & Diversity and Access & Inclusion. College orientation forms part of the application process. Pre-COVID-19, this included a mix of open day events and faculty / course information presented to applicants during the interview and selection process. This included group presentations by teaching and support services staff. Included in the group presentation was information on key services and facilities offered by the College, a generic subject area overview as well as further course information such as course structure and assessment arrangements. During the COVID-19 pandemic there has been limited opportunities for applicants to attend these events however, the College has made good use of technology, such as Microsoft Teams, videos on the College website and social media platforms to replicate, as far as possible, these events.

In the period between an offer of a place on a course being made to an applicant and induction, activities are planned to ensure that contact is maintained with the student. A digital Welcome Newsletter is issued to all applicants that receive an offer of a place at the College, which includes information of finance and funding, core skills support (see below), encourages applicants to tell the College of any support requirements so that Learner Support can work with the student to develop support strategies and eliminate potential barriers, highlights the work of the Advice, Guidance & Learner Support team and the Students' Association. One-to-one contact is offered to all students that indicate that they have specific support requirements at application stage.

To ensure that students have the best opportunity to achieve success on their chosen course, the College invites the majority of Further Education learners to complete Core Skills Profiling (BKSB) prior to the commencement of their course. Profiling helps the College determine each learner's current level of Communication and Numeracy and the results help to inform the development of support packages appropriate to each student. We have assessed this initiative as an example of good practice.

Induction information is issued to students ahead of the start of the academic year. This includes a programme of induction activities and a further information on student finance and student services, how to access key College systems and details of the College's key policies. Some courses also run course specific events which provide students an opportunity to meet tutors and classmates. Pre-COVID-19, induction week allowed students the opportunity to meet both academic and support staff, representatives from the Students' Association, and their fellow students. Although the COVID-19 guidance in place at the start of the 2021/22 academic session meant that remote learning was in place for the majority of students and restricted the number of students that attended campuses, the College still ran on campus induction events with staff available, supported by the Students' Association, to provide on-site advice and direct students around the buildings. For remote learners, induction information was made available via the MyKelvin app and information videos were posted on the College website aimed at helping students who had not been on campus before or were unfamiliar with changes on campus due to new social distancing measures.

Objective 1: There are processes and controls in place to be reasonably assured that students are orientated appropriately at the beginning of the year (Continued).

A range of information for students is made available via the College website or can be accessed via the MyKelvin application which students can download on to mobile devices. Our review noted content for the following areas:

- Welcome to induction, including information videos;
- Funding;
- Study Support;
- Mental health and wellbeing;
- Library services;
- Campus information;
- Students' Association;
- IT services and support including access to devices for learning;
- Digital technologies and VLE guidance;
- Dedicated Students' Association website;
- MyKelvin use; and
- Health and Safety.

From our review of online material, and the management arrangements established for the orientation of students during the 2021/22 academic year, we noted that the process was effective despite the national COVID-19 restrictions in place at that time. We noted that the admissions and student support services teams were able to learn from the experience of the previous academic year, which was delivered under much tighter COVID-19 restrictions and were able to refine processes that did not suit remote learning and induction to develop a good range of online material for students to access. We noted that accessibility to support services for remote learners is reflected in the College's commitment to digital inclusion, through provision of loan laptops and Wi-Fi connectivity to students.

Academic tutoring within the College plays a crucial role in helping to deliver a positive student experience, encouraging positive attendance and retention, and supporting students through their learning experience. Tutors are expected to be the first point of contact for academic, welfare, wellbeing, and support for students. Tutors have regular one-to-one progress meetings with students which provide academic and pastoral support, as well as signposting students to the appropriate support service teams, including advice on financial support, guidance and wellbeing.

The College has a Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults Policy and Procedure, and events are scheduled during the academic year which support the College's arrangements and procedures for: study skills; support needs; alternative assessment arrangements; mental health and wellbeing; events for Care Experienced students; and additional skills for managing life beyond the College, such as money management and employability.

Objective 1: There are processes and controls in place to be reasonably assured that students are orientated appropriately at the beginning of the year (Continued).

The Students' Association is represented at the College by two Student Presidents who are elected from the student body. The Students' Association provides input to the induction and orientation process organising a series of events promoting awareness of the student representative network, providing advice and signposting to the College's support services. The Students' Association also encourages students to get involved in clubs and social groups, although opportunities to participate in these activities have been limited during the COVID-19 pandemic. Notable examples of groups set up by the Students' Association include the ESOL speakers group and the 'We Care' club which aims to provide support for care experienced students.

The Advice, Guidance and Learner Support Team work in partnership with Action for Children who offer tailored one to one support to care experienced learners. The Action for Children STAY worker can provide support in many areas, including assisting with any barriers to engagement, budgeting support, advice with time management issues and support with mental health. The Team also works in conjunction with Action for Children on a Glasgow City Council and SDS initiative, which aims to see school leavers in Glasgow supported to stay in positive destinations. In addition, Action for Children can help learners with ongoing issues out with college such as housing, employment, homelessness, family disputes and liaising with other professionals. The aim is to make sure that learners feel supported and stay engaged with their college course.

The College conducts an early student experience survey to gather information on their experience from first contact to shortly after induction. Feedback is analysed and results used to inform any improvement actions if required.

Objective 2: There are processes and controls in place to be reasonably assured that students are identified and provided with support if struggling financially.

Student Funding staff work within the parameters of SFC guidance to provide the most appropriate funding packages for students. Students should arrange their finances before starting their course and information on finance and funding is included within the Welcome Newsletter issued to applicants that receive an offer ahead of the academic year. The College has set instructions and guidance for the funding applications on its website which directs students to the Student Funding team who support the application process.

A student can be referred to the Student Funding team through the Advice, Guidance and Learner Support teams, Students' Association, or from their Faculty and academic tutor who work closely with the student.

Identification of students requiring support is largely dependent on students completing the funding application process. Learner Support, Advice and Guidance staff, as well as tutors, may also identify students in need of financial support and would direct students to the Student Funding team for assistance.

Low attendance or engagement is recognised as a potential indicator that a student may be at risk of withdrawing from their course of study. Attendance monitoring is conducted at several levels, including by tutors, curriculum teams, the Admissions team and by Student Funding. Where low attendance / engagement is identified the College contacts students to remind them of the impact on funding. A further message may be sent inviting the student to a meeting if attendance / engagement falls to improve or a pattern of non-attendance is identified. At these meetings the College will try to establish reasons for non-attendance and address these. There may be some instances where absences are caused by financial difficulties.

If student support services staff become aware of students who are struggling financially, they try to address the situation through the use of discretionary funds. However, it should be noted that not all students can be assisted by these funds due to eligibility criteria and limits to the College's student funding allocations.

From our review of online material and the management arrangement established for identifying and supporting students who are struggling financially we noted that the process was good and in line with expectations.

Objective 3: There are processes and controls in place to be reasonably assured that students are identified and provided with support if struggling academically.

Supporting students to succeed academically is embedded within the key ambitions and aims of the College Strategic Plan 2022-2027. A key principle of the College's strategic ambition is there should be a reasonable expectation that students are supported throughout their leaner journey to achieve successful outcomes. The strategic purpose of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy is to provide the highest quality learning, teaching and assessment which meets the widest range of needs and supports all learners to succeed and fulfil their potential. The strategy identifies that a key enabler of the strategic priorities includes strengthening the alignment of support services. Ongoing development of Guidance and Learning Support services will ensure effective integration closely with the Class Tutor role so that each learner is supported to develop their individual learning skills. This has largely been achieved through the Student Advice, Guidance and Learner Support teams being brought together into a single service located alongside the Library Service. This integrated approach will improve information sharing and provide students with a more efficient support service.

Supporting students academically begins during the recruitment and selection process, which includes pre-start meetings and interviews to ensure that students are placed on a course that is well matched to them.

The College has a number of learner support initiatives available, beginning before induction and carrying on throughout the academic year. As noted under objective 1, above, the Core Skills Profiling (BKSB) initiative prior to the commencement of their course programme is on offer to students to assist with the transition to further education. Students are encouraged to participate in the course, which takes place prior to induction, and focusses on core skills.

Library services staff are available on campus, and remotely, to provide basic IT assistance to students as well as support with research and getting the most out of College systems. On campus, the Advice, Guidance and Learner Support staff are based within the Library Services thereby providing ease of access to a good range of support services in one location.

Class Tutors have a key role in supporting students academically, from providing a range of information to students during induction, meeting students through regular one-to-ones, reviewing students' academic progress, attending curriculum team progression meetings, monitoring the effectiveness of additional support provision and encouraging students to make use of the specialist services the College offers to help deal with difficulties, such as guidance staff and the Wellbeing Officer.

Students who are struggling academically are referred to the Guidance staff by teaching staff if they are unsure of the student's issues or alternatively to the Learner Support team if the tutor has identified a support need. If the student is struggling due to a previously unrecognised support need or needs help with some basic study skills then Learner Support can provide the student with the required assistance. If the academic problems are the result of an underlying personal issue the Guidance team can provide assistance including a counselling service and will work with the student to help resolve these issues.

Student progression review meetings are held by curriculum teams during the academic year. Although the primary objective is making a decision on whether students will successfully progress through the course, they also offer an opportunity for curriculum staff to meet and discuss student specific issues and agree plans to support them through their course.

Objective 4: There are processes and controls in place to be reasonably assured that students are given adequate support if they have a disability or other special needs.

The College tries to identify in advance of enrolment any disabilities or additional support needs that a student may have prior to starting College. The application form is designed so that students can disclose their requirements and the Welcome Newsletter issued to applicants who receive an offer of a place at the College encourages students to notify the College of any support needs. Discussions with students during keep warm activities, interviews, pre-start events and liaison with schools helps the College to better understand the requirements of any new students and identify any disabilities or additional support needs not disclosed on applications. One-to-one contact is offered to all students that indicate that they have specific support requirements at application stage, including a disability.

As part of the admissions process the College aims to match the student to the course which is best suited to them. This may include supporting a student with a disability or other support need on a mainstream course, or a course designed specifically for students with additional support needs.

Teaching staff may also refer students to the Learner Support team. When the College identifies a support need, Learner Support staff will work with the student to develop an individual support plan which documents the specific support requirements of the student and also identifies any learning goals and objectives the student has for the year. The student and Learner Support Advisor both sign the support plan after discussion around:

- student background and experience;
- effects of disability on study:
- course content and any study requirements;
- mobility, dexterity, speech, hearing, vision, reading, written work, note-taking skills, concentrating and memory, computing skills, using course equipment;
- examination/ assessment requirements; and
- personal human support.

The assessment provides:

- adjustments which will be made by the College;
- recommendations for access to assistive technology;
- equipment training; and
- human support.

The plan is monitored and reviewed along with the student throughout the year.Learner Support staff work with students who require assistance throughout the year. The College can provide a range of assistive equipment for students, and additional financial support for travel to and from College if appropriate, academic support such as dyslexia support including referral to Education Psychologist if required, , as well as purchasing specialist equipment or learning aids. The College campuses are designed to ensure that they are accessible for disabled students.

Objective 5: There are processes and controls in place to be reasonably assured that students are made to feel part of the College community.

The College is committed to equality in education. Applicants are selected on the basis of their individual merits, abilities and aptitudes. The College seeks to attract a wide range of applicants from different social, cultural and educational backgrounds who can demonstrate the academic ability and/or the skills required to succeed in their chosen studies.

The College has implemented surveys which gather feedback from students on their overall College experience, including wellbeing and student perception of feeling part of the College community. This has included early intervention surveys, annual student satisfaction surveys and Leavers Destination Surveys. Feedback is also obtained through Students' Association attendance at Class Representative meetings, curriculum team and management meetings. The Students' Association Presidents also meet regularly with the Principal and members of the senior management team to highlight issues and attend Board and Sub-Committee meetings.

Discussions with staff and the President of the Students' Association noted that the period during the COVID-19 pandemic has been extremely challenging for students which has been reflected in the increased numbers of students that have presented to student support staff looking for guidance and counselling The College has identified that increasing numbers of students have highlighted feelings of isolation, particularly during the early stages of the pandemic when lockdown restrictions were more severe. In response, the College has recruited a Wellbeing Officer who engages directly with students to provide support and advice. Counselling services are available to students on campus when possible and the supports teams are also available to take calls.

The College community is supported in a number of ways, including:

- the College provides resources to the Students' Association, including a dedicated Students' Association office in the Springburn campus. Redevelopment of the College campus buildings is planned in 2022 which will include repurposing of some teaching spaces to provide social and collaboration spaces for students. Plans also include provision for improved and larger Students' Association spaces within the Springburn and Easterhouse campuses.
- the Students' Association helps students to establish clubs or societies.
- a Learner Engagement Officer focuses on enhancing learner engagement in all aspects of learning, teaching and college life.
- the Learner Engagement Officer organises a class representative system whereby learners can provide feedback on how well learning & teaching approaches, programmes and the College's services meets their needs. The College provides training for all class representatives.
- a number of student focus groups are held throughout the year. These are set up by each subject area to look at specific aspects of the curriculum but can also look at wider College issues. The Student's Association has two elected Presidents who are also members of the Board of Management. As part of their roles both in the Students' Association and on the Board of Management, the Presidents promote the interest of students and provide support to students.
- Appropriate strategies are in place to promote inclusion, equality and diversity and prevent discrimination and anti-social behaviour.
- A calendar of dates for events and recognition, dialogue, and celebration for trans, gender diverse and intersectional communities is promoted in the College.

Henderson Loggie

Aberdeen 45 Queen's Road AB15 4ZN T: 01224 322 100 F: 01224 327 911
Dundee The Vision Building, 20 Greenmarket DD1 4QB T: 01382 200 055 F: 01382 221 240
Edinburgh Ground Floor, 11-15 Thistle Street EH2 1DF T: 0131 226 0200 F: 0131 220 3269
Glasgow 100 West George Street, G2 1PP T: 0141 471 9870

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