

25 April 2023

Professor Chris O'Neil  
Principal and Chief Executive  
UHI Inverness

Dear Professor O'Neil,

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited UHI Inverness in February 2023 to undertake an Annual Engagement Visit (AEV). During our visit, we talked to learners, staff, and stakeholders, and worked closely with the senior managers.

The team found the following major strengths in the college's work.

### **Recruitment**

Curriculum teams have improved engagement with schools to raise awareness of individual programmes and progression routes. Staff collaborate well with local secondary schools to coordinate and host a series of information events to help school-age learners make informed choices about their future learning. The college has adjusted its marketing and promotional approaches to make better use of social media. The number of applications is now almost in line with the college target. Admissions, and Access and Transitions staff provide good support to care-experienced young people and priority groups throughout the application process. From application to induction, Personal Development Advisors (PDAs) support new learners well, to ensure funding and additional support requirements are in place for the start of a programme. Almost all learners are satisfied with the quality of information they receive from staff prior to applying for a programme.

### **Retention**

All curriculum areas sequence the delivery of induction activities over the first term. This is enabling learners to incrementally develop and apply knowledge about college systems and arrangements at relevant stages of their programme. Curriculum staff track learner attendance, retention, and progression effectively. They make good use of weekly meetings with PDAs to share issues and initiate early interventions. Almost all learners know which members of staff to contact for academic and pastoral support and are happy with the level of the support they receive. The college proactively provides support to learners to alleviate financial hardship. Learning support staff use *The Bothy* space well to provide learners with help and individual learner support sessions. The Highlands and Islands Student Association (HISA) is represented well on college committees and the college board. HISA representatives value one-to-one meetings with senior managers to convey their views. Almost all teaching staff gather and collate learner views effectively and use this information to make improvements to curriculum delivery and assessment arrangements.

### **Attainment**

All curriculum areas adjust assessment arrangements effectively to accommodate the needs of individual learners. The rate of learner attainment on part-time further education (FE)

programmes is 3% above the national sector norm. Most teaching staff operate flexibly to provide FE learners with the opportunity to be successful in their programme of study. An alternative pathway is in place to support those learners who are struggling with the demands their programme to ensure they have an additional opportunity to progress. When uploading resources to the college Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), teaching staff make good use of the facility to check teaching materials for accessibility issues. They draw on the results to adjust materials to meet the needs of learners. Staff take swift action to provide learners with access to wellbeing and counselling services. These arrangements work well and have reduced waiting times for learners to access support. Most curriculum staff and PDAs meet weekly to reflect on and monitor learner attainment across programmes. They put in place a range of interventions to improve attainment on programmes that have not reached agreed targets. These include providing one-to-one support and access to additional online materials.

## Progression

The number of FE learners progressing to a positive destination is high. The majority of school-age learners undertaking a senior phase programme indicate that they intended to apply for a full-time programme at UHI Inverness. Most teaching staff maintain good relationships with regional employers. Curriculum teams make effective use of Industry Advisory Boards, guest lectures by employers and industry visits to increase awareness of employment opportunities for learners. The introduction of additional units to enhance employability, increase opportunities to develop practical skills, and participate in mock interviews is raising learner awareness of the importance of developing skills for entering the workplace. Staff provide learners with good access to advice and information to ease progression to further learning or employment. In most curriculum areas, staff make significant adjustments to delivery approaches in response to feedback from learner questionnaires.

The following areas for improvement were identified by the team and discussed with the senior managers:

- The college does not yet follow-up with learners who may have only partially completed applications to investigate and understand better the reasons why.
- Although Foundation Apprenticeship (FA) programmes attract a large number of applications, many programmes do not achieve viable numbers.
- The overall rate of learner withdrawal for full-time FE programmes has increased by around 10%.
- There are insufficient numbers of Student Voice representatives in place, and many have not attended training to help them undertake their role.
- The overall rate of learner attainment for full-time FE programmes has declined over the last three years and is now just below the national sector norm.

### Main points for action

No main points for action were identified.

### What happens next?

We are confident that the college has the capacity to continue to improve. We will continue to monitor progress through ongoing engagement with the college link HM Inspector.

Joe Mulholland  
HM Inspector