

1 August 2023

Mrs Hannah Ritchie-Muir
Interim Principal and Chief Executive
Outer Hebrides UHI

Dear Mrs Ritchie-Muir

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited Outer Hebrides UHI on 28 February 2023 to undertake the Annual Engagement Visit at the college. During our visit we spoke to learners, staff, stakeholders, and managers of the college.

The team found the following strengths in the college's work:

Recruitment

Increased short programme provision has improved learner enrolment levels and there has been a significant increase in recruitment of Modern Apprenticeships and school-based learners. College staff are working well with the local authority on a series of strategic growth initiatives to develop the curriculum to meet current and future skills requirements. The Campus Redevelopment Project is helping the college to redesign the curriculum and reconfigure the college estate to support sustainable delivery of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics subjects including renewables and engineering. All learners are supported well by staff throughout application and admission arrangements and Learning Centre managers provide helpful support to learners making an application for a college place. Curriculum managers are taking good account of feedback from learners and employers to design programmes that provide potential learners with a range of flexible learning options. At an early stage of programmes, curriculum teams meet frequently with learners to gather feedback on their initial experience of college and ensure they are on the right level of programme.

Retention

Rates of learner withdrawal from further education (FE) programmes are lower than the sector average and early predications for session 2022-23 indicate improved retention levels. Curriculum teams incorporate a range of informative events and activities within programmes that motivate and encourage learners to complete their studies. The college has agreements in place with other UHI colleges to share delivery of programmes that have a small number of learners to ensure the viability of the programmes and subsequent retention of learners. Teaching staff make good use of Course Committee meetings to raise and discuss issues related to learner withdrawal from programmes and to agree actions to improve retention. Curriculum teams make adjustments to timetables to enable learners to attend college at times that do not conflict with employment and caring responsibilities. All learners benefit from weekly one-to-one meetings with their course tutor to discuss their progress and individual needs, explore career pathways and reflect on their personal development.

Attainment

In 2020-21, the overall learner success rate for full-time FE programmes was in line with the national average. Weekly core skills workshops support learners well to develop and achieve their required core skill levels. The college responds well to meet the skills needs of industry and employers. This includes delivering additional industry awards and tickets required for employment in a specific sector. The Pedagogical and Academic Skills Enhancement course supports teaching staff to analyse curriculum trends and develop new curriculum approaches to improve attainment. Learner satisfaction rates are higher than the national average and learners feel well supported by the college. The high level of learner responses to surveys and questionnaires provides staff with comprehensive feedback that is used constructively to influence actions to improve attainment.

Progression

The college learner positive destination rate is 4% above the Scottish average and there are high levels of internal progression from FE to HE level programmes. Teaching staff have strong industry experience and draw productively on their knowledge of the workplace to motivate and encourage learners to progress to work or further learning. College and local authority staff are working well together to provide a partnership approach to address current and projected skills needs in the Western Isles. Learners are aware of the range of progression opportunities and value programme guidance and the services of centralised support staff to help them make choices about their next steps to work or learning.

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

- Rates of learner success have declined for both full-time and part-time FE programmes.
- Approximately 18% of full-time FE learners withdrew from their programme last year.
- Most Student Voice Representatives are not fully aware of their role, have not engaged in training and do not attend college-wide meetings.

There were no main points for action identified during the visit.

What happens next?

We are confident that the college has made satisfactory progress and has the capacity to continue to improve. We will continue to monitor progress with regular contact through the link HM Inspector.

Peter B Connelly
HM Inspector