

13 August 2024

Seonaidh McDonald
Principal
UHI Orkney

Dear Seonaidh,

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited UHI Orkney in June 2024 to undertake an Annual Engagement Visit. 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:

Learner progress and outcomes

The overall successful completion rate for full-time and part-time further education (FE) programmes are higher than sector norms. The overall successful completion rate for care-experienced learners, those with disabilities, and those from ethnic minorities are above the sector norm. The Highlands and Islands Students' Association (HISA) and college staff work well together to organise campaigns and events that successfully promote a college-wide culture of respect and inclusivity. The number of learners seeking mental health support is increasing. College managers work well together to improve the quality of learning and teaching. The senior leadership team makes effective use of labour market information (LMI) to develop the curriculum around current and emerging industry requirements. Deputy principals meet monthly with curriculum leaders to agree actions, share best practice, and identify strategies to improve learner outcomes. Almost all staff engage productively in quality assurance arrangements.

Approaches to assuring and enhancing the quality of learning and teaching including professional updating

Quality staff provide good support to curriculum teams preparing for external verification of assessment by awarding bodies. Curriculum staff engage productively with employers and industry representatives to align the curriculum to current and projected industry needs. They draw constructively on information and feedback from industry partners to ensure learners receive relevant, up-to-date training that prepares them well for transition to employment and further study. Programmes for school-age learners who have disengaged from their learning are successfully assisting young people to overcome barriers to education. A programme of supported study sessions and essay-writing seminars for mainland and island learners provides good opportunities for learners to access helpful additional support out with class-times.

Learner Engagement

Learners feel valued and supported well by staff. HISA officers contribute productively to the Learning, Teaching, and Quality Committee to convey the views and concerns of

learners. Teaching staff use a variety of methods to gather learners' views on programme units. They draw effectively on the findings to make adjustments that improve the learning experience. Almost all learners benefit strongly from work-based experiences to gain a deeper and wider knowledge of industry standards and practices. The student experience team works collaboratively with staff to address issues and concerns raised through the learner red button. A few teaching teams engage well with learners in providing assessment feedback and draw effectively on the findings to improve arrangements and reduce the assessment burden. Teaching staff encourage and engage effectively with learners to contribute their views to improve lessons. Learners enjoy their classes and feel empowered by staff to influence their own learning and assessment choices.

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

- The AY 2022-23, learner partial success rates for most full-time programmes are higher than the sector norm.
- The AY 2022-23 withdrawal rates for full-time FE learners increased by 4.2% compared to 2021-2022.
- Overall, learners are not sufficiently aware of the range of wider vocational skills they are developing, particularly meta skills.
- There are no college-wide arrangements for teaching teams to share effective practice to further improve outcomes for learners.
- Almost all learners are not aware of the role and work of the HISA.
- Not all learner voice representatives (LVR) have engaged in training to help them to carry out their role.
- Arrangements for capturing learner views do not take sufficient account of the wider learning experience to support broader curriculum evaluation and planning.
- The 2022–23, SFC student satisfaction and engagement survey response rate is significantly below the sector average.

Main points for action

- College staff and HISA should work closely to improve learners' awareness of the role and work of HISA.
- Senior managers should improve arrangements for capturing learner views on the wider learning experience.

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.

Jacqueline McLellan
HM Inspector