

10 September 2024

Lydia Rohmer
Principal
UHI North, West and Hebrides

Dear Ms Rohmer

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited UHI North, West and Hebrides College 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

Staff use effective arrangements to ensure learners feel welcome and encourage them to develop early connections with their lecturers and peers. Induction programmes are informative and help learners to settle in quickly to college environment.

Learners and staff use weekly guidance classes to discuss and explore opportunities for further study and future careers options. Student services teams have responded well to the significant increase in demand for learner support. Personal learning support plans (PLSPs) are shared with curriculum teams to ensure that class teachers can adapt learning and teaching approaches to meet identified learning needs. Staff make effective use of alternative assessments to meet the needs of individual learners. Most curriculum teams use tracking systems to monitor learner progress and achievement and use this information well to identify learner performance and arrange additional support for learners.

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

The executive leadership team (ELT) carried out a comprehensive review of the curriculum portfolio. Managers drew constructively on the findings to create a curriculum plan for 2024–25 that eases and simplifies the learner journey. Course committee meetings are used effectively by all staff to review learner progress and agree adjustments to improve programme design and delivery. Teaching staff engage well in professional dialogue and team-teaching activities to share and adopt effective practice, and a few participate in a peer observation process. School-age learners in the region are supported to develop digital skills through access to programmes that prepare them well for progression to work or further learning. In most subject areas, curriculum teams liaise well with industry partners to inform curriculum planning. In almost all classes, learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning to help them to develop confidence, independence, and critical thinking skills. Digital technology is used effectively by curriculum teams to maintain engagement with learners off-campus.

Learner Engagement

Student voice representatives (SVRs) attend course committee meetings in the majority of curriculum areas. The learner voice is influencing improvements to curriculum delivery and the learner experience. Most learners appreciate being encouraged by teachers to take responsibility for their own learning as part of preparation for progression to employment or further study. The work of the Highlands and Islands Student Association (HISA) is valued by learners and college staff. HISA representatives contribute productively to the board of management and its subcommittees to ensure that the learner voice is taken into account. Most learners value opportunities to develop and apply practical skills and vocational knowledge within work placements. Learners are confident and comfortable about seeking help from staff when they need it. As a result, they feel well supported throughout their programme.

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

- There are no college-wide arrangements for staff to access and use data on learner attendance, retention, and attainment to support improvement.
- Most staff would benefit from increased access to professional learning on the use of digital technology to enhance learning and teaching, including the use of artificial intelligence (AI).
- Staff do not signpost or promote meta skills sufficiently to learners within programmes.
- Across most campuses, most learners do not have sufficient knowledge of the role and purpose of HISA and SVRs.
- Almost half of SVRs have not completed training to support them to carry out their role effectively. This is reducing the impact of the learner voice.
- The level of FE learner participation in the Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey at North Highland College is very low, at 31.4%.

Main points for action

- College staff and HISA should work closely to improve learners' awareness of the role and purpose of HISA and SVRs.
- Senior managers should implement college-wide arrangements to enable staff to access data to monitor learner performance.

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.

Karen Stevenson
HM Inspector