

28 March 2023

Martin Jones
Principal and Chief Executive
UHI Argyll

Dear Mr Jones,

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited UHI Argyll in January 2023 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.

Recruitment

Almost all learners find the online application process easy to navigate and complete. They are also satisfied with the quality and level of information they receive about their programme prior to enrolment. Support staff collect valuable information about learner needs at application stage. This allows support and curriculum staff to identify, plan and provide the necessary support that individual learners may require when enrolling at the college. Support staff are proactive in contacting potential learners who may have initiated but not finalised an application, to offer support and guidance on completing the application process. Most curriculum staff engage productively with secondary schools in the region to coordinate and deliver information sessions, taster programmes and college open days. Centre managers have worked collaboratively to enhance arrangements for the promotion of programmes to stakeholders and communities. This has included more effective use of social media and promotional material, and well-promoted campus open days. Curriculum teams make effective use of learner feedback on application, enrolment, and induction processes to plan for improvements.

Retention

Overall rates of learner withdrawal for full-time further education (FE) programmes are 2% lower than the sector norm. In all curriculum areas, staff use reflective practice meetings, Professional Development Reviews (PDRs), and UHI website blogs effectively to share professional practice and enhance the learner experience. All Curriculum teams make effective use of team meetings and Progression Boards to track learner attendance and achievement. These meetings allow teaching staff and Student Advisors to initiate interventions to support retention. All learners value the arrangements put in place by the college to alleviate financial hardship. These include the provision of free breakfasts, lunches, and food to take home. Almost all learners are satisfied with the support they receive from staff and know which member/s of staff to contact for academic and pastoral support. They commented that they feel that staff care about them as individuals. Overall, learners indicate high levels of satisfaction with their programme and learning. In all teaching departments, curriculum staff make good use of learner feedback to enhance

learning and teaching approaches and make improvements to how the curriculum is delivered.

Attainment

The overall rate of learner attainment on full-time FE learner programmes is high and is above the sector norm. All curriculum areas use alternative assessment arrangements effectively to accommodate the individual needs of learners. Managers in most curriculum teams work productively with external stakeholders to capture and adopt effective practice from a range of sources to enhance programmes. Support staff have adapted college Performance Development Review arrangements to incorporate and promote the activities of staff reflective practice groups. Almost all Student Voice Representatives make good use of additional online training to support them to carry out their role.

College managers have undertaken a comprehensive review of the college's School-College Partnership provision. This has resulted in a wider range of programmes being made available to senior phase learners.

Progression

The number of learners completing full-time FE programmes and progressing to a positive destination has increased and is now in line with pre-pandemic levels. College managers draw effectively on their good relationships with regional employers to keep up to date with industry developments, adjust programmes to increase employment opportunities, and pilot a new programme to meet industry demand. In all curriculum areas staff support learners well to make informed decisions about their progression options. Learners feel reassured by the level of support they receive from teaching staff to make informed choices about progression to work and further learning. Guidance staff deliver useful support to learners to help progression to employment and higher education. Most curriculum managers have established employer forums and draw constructively on feedback from these forums to adjust programmes to meet current and projected industry needs.

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

- Recruitment to all FE programmes has declined over time and is down significantly from the previous year.
- The overall rate of learner withdrawal for FE programmes has increased by around 5%.
- Highlands and Islands Students' Association representatives have not engaged sufficiently with learners this session.
- Arrangements for corporate service teams to gather feedback and carry out self-evaluation are not yet consistent across all areas.
- A small number of programmes have low rates of learner attainment, and this is impacting negatively on overall college attainment for full-time FE programmes.

- Teaching staff do not receive sufficient feedback from managers on the quality of self-evaluation to help them further improve their contribution to the evaluation process.

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 on-going engagement with the college link HM Inspector.

Joe Mulholland
HM Inspector