Lews Castle College UHI – Commentary for ROA October 2019

Credit Activity

The volume of credits delivered for 2018/19 was 5,266. This was an increase on all previous years but just short of the target of 5,348 credits.

In 2018/19, we focussed strongly on student recruitment and retention and this is now yielding dividends with improved retention and KPIs. We also continued to build stronger relationships and partnerships with the local community and business leaders. We will continue to develop and build on this in 2019/20 and beyond. The appointment of an additional UHI resource (Director of Transformational Change) in September 2019 to work with the Academic Partners across UHI will aid this. This post has been allocated to Lews Castle College UHI for six months and commenced on 30 September 2019. We will continue to develop new courses round STEM/STEAM with entrepreneurship embedded at their centre with the view to building and regenerating the local economy. The opening of the Innovation Centre and the relationships to business and the community in general will help to move our focus in this direction.

Over the last two years, LCC UHI has seen a drop in FE applications and a rise in HE applications, especially at postgraduate level with LCC UHI having the second highest level of students at postgraduate level across the network. The drop in FE can be attributed to local demographic changes and the national trend of more pupils remaining in school for the senior phase and the associated shift from FE to HE over time. Significantly more pupils are also now entering directly into training or employment (41% in 2017/18). Coupled with this is significant demographic change; from mid-2017 to mid-2018 the population of Scotland grew to the highest ever with a population of 5,438,100. This was an increase of 13,300 (0.2%) from the previous year. Over this period the population of the Outer Hebrides fell by 143. In terms of net migration, the greatest loss was in the 15 to 19 age group and the highest gain was in the 50 to 54 age group. In addition to the largest loss in the 15 to 19 age group, the Outer Hebrides also suffered a significant loss in the 20 to 24 age group, the only island area to do so. This resulted in a total loss of 105 persons in the 15 to 24 age group.

The realisation that much of the government focus is on the 19-24 age group and Developing the Young Workforce is recognised but we also need to ensure we do not lose our focus on widening participation and our commitment to mature learners which has been a central plank of our curriculum offering in the past.

During 2018/19 a new Curriculum Planning and Review Tool was introduced. This is currently being used to examine LMI, local and regional policies, review our curriculum offer and analyse the content of our current FE curriculum in order to plan and market the curriculum offer in a more timeous manner. We have ensured essential skills, in line with the Regional Essential Skills Policy, are embedded in all full-time course and identified a baseline for online curriculum development. We have also ensured that SFC Workplace Standards are integrated into all our FE curriculum including more effective employer engagement and increased work experience activity for learners. This is complementary to the Regional Skills Workplace Policy presently being finalised. We have currently withdrawn 3 full-time FE courses: NC Business, SVY professional Cookery Level 2 and Fabrication and Welding Level 6. The College will participate in the planned Regional Approach to Curriculum Portfolio Review to further enhance our offer and meet the regional and local skills requirements.

In 2018/19 the local authority Comhairle nan Eilean Siar secured the bid to deliver Foundation Apprentices in the Western Isles. They chose to deliver these through their own training unit independently from the college. Despite this we maintained good numbers in the senior phase as the result of a new PDA in Construction and also additional numbers of pupils studying Higher Psychology.

## Student Performance

In June 2018 the College initiated the Improving KPI Project to identify the factors in falling key performance indicators and proposed mechanisms to address them. New recruitment procedures improved personal academic tutor support, additional support for learning/study skills and an attendance monitoring system have proven successful for the learner experience and the College KPI. Student performance in full-time FE courses was particularly disappointing during 2017/18, with the percentage of students completing successfully falling from 68% to 61%, this was largely attributed to learners withdrawing. Measures put in place to address this have resulted in a significant improvement during 2018/19, with the rate of FT students completing their courses successfully returning to 68%. In addition, adherence to the Regional FE Admissions policy ensures we identify protected characteristics at the point of application and PLSPs, in accordance with the Regional Learner Support Policy to provide an inclusive environment, are in place from the outset along with other supports as required e.g. Care experienced students often need additional tutor support. There is a need to sustain this improvement to achieve a completed successful rate of 70% in 2019/20.

Some subject areas including: Art, Hairdressing, Fashion Professional Cookery and Engineering are performing well and achieve completed successful rates of over 80%. In line with the Regional Strategy for Enhancement of FE Attainment and new proposals, the college will review and monitor with UHI colleagues all FE courses with a focus on attainment and retention. Sharing best practice and implementing measures to improve KPIs.

The SVQ course for apprentices in Carpentry and Joinery is successful and continues to attract learners. New courses in Fashion and Electrical Engineering returned high completed success rates.

Young learners in the 16 to 19 age group account for 57% of full-time learners. In 2018/19, the successful completion rate of 16 to 19-year-old learners significantly improved from 50% to 62%, to be on par with sector levels. Early intervention to address attendance issues flagged by the introduction of the new policy cited above had positive impacts across all programmes. The increasing numbers of students presenting with mental health issues and the offer of additional academic support and increased College counselling provision were significant factors in helping to address this. This is in line with the emerging UHI’s Mental Health Strategy the College offers all students an in-house counselling service and publicises the online counselling service offered by UHI. As these 16 to 19-year-old learners make up the largest group, this is a significant factor in the improvement in the college successful completion rate. There is a need to sustain this improvement in the successful completion rate for younger learners.

In 2018/19, the successful completion rate of 20 to 24-year-old learners had been declining and fell to 62%. There is a need to improve outcome for these learners. Several factors may contribute to this including juggling childcare and part time work, also young adults may have had a poor experience in school. Measures in place include early implementation of PLSPs, access to additional funding e.g. Childcare/Discretionary in line with the Regional Student Support Funds Policy and additional core skills drop-ins are planned for next session to support learning. This cohort of students may be more reluctant to seek out help and require effective PAT support and referral to Student Services.

Older learners in the over 25 age group have a high rate of successful completion of 83%, well above the sector attainment rate.

In 2018/19, the performance level of female learners increased from 58% to 71%, female learners performed 6% better than males, reversing the gender gap trend. There is a need to sustain this improvement in the successful completion rate of female learners whilst improving the rate for males.

Care experienced learners have a high rate of successful completion well above the sector attainment rate. And at 67% significantly improved from 25% in 2017-18.

The college has a good record for providing learning opportunities for learners who experience barriers to learning, particularly learners disclosing a disability. The attainment rate for these learners, 68% is consistently higher than sector levels.

The success rate for part time learners has fluctuated over the last three years and remains high at 91%, better than the national rate of 77% and the regional rate of 82%. The partial success rate for part time learners has decreased over the last three years to 6% and is now better than the national rate of 13% and the regional rate of 9%.

The withdrawal rate for part time learners has remained low for the last three years falling to 2% well ahead of both the national and regional performance rates of 10% and 6% respectively.