

North Highland College UHI

Outcome Agreement Self-Evaluation Report - 2018-19

**October 2019**

***Recruitment***

The College worked closely with regional partner colleges to implement and monitor local and regional strategies to successfully achieve regional recruitment targets. The College’s performance in recruiting students on our Further Education courses, by achieving both Core and additional ESIF-funded student credit targets, contributed to this positive outcome. The college success was due to increased part time opportunities, including those for school-based learners, given the drop in FT recruitment being experienced in both FE and HE.

Significant focus continued in the further implementation of Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland’s Youth Employment Strategy, by working in partnership with schools, employers and the local DYW board. This resulted in further increases in the number of credits delivered to senior phase learners studying vocational qualifications and to S3 learners and above as part of school -college provision, which sit at levels much greater than the regional and sector averages. The College has worked in partnership with West Highland and Inverness Colleges and local authority and SDS representatives to develop a Highland Council Regional School Strategy to develop learning pathways and further extend access to our Senior phase provision to local and regional schools by increasing flexible/virtual learning opportunities.

In 2018/19, the college has seen a continued growth in its Modern Apprenticeship contracts and doubled its Foundation Apprenticeship activity through its partnership with schools, employers, SDS and DYW North Highland; and through the regional Work Based Learning Hub to work across local planning boundaries to broaden the Foundation Apprenticeship offer in rural and remote areas through technologically-enabled delivery.

The College has recognised that given the levels of demographic change anticipated nationally, regionally and locally, with a substantial decline in numbers in the 16-29 age group predicted, there is a compelling need to focus efforts on providing accessible learning opportunities relevant to all working age people. In response the College completed a comprehensive Curriculum Review exercise between January and June 2019 based on themes of growth and efficiency. All substantive courses were formally reviewed, the outcomes of which have informed the development of our curriculum strategy for the next 3-5 years. This centres around three key themes; meeting the needs of our key employment sectors, meeting the needs of learners on their journeys and widening access & inclusion.

Our highest priority will be to ensure the NHC curriculum is well aligned with the needs of our local high employment and high growth sectors, which have a strong focus on STEM (Science (including health related sciences), Technology, Engineering & Maths) and Tourism & Hospitality skills. Our STEM activity contributes significantly to the regional STEM strategy, given the college delivers a higher proportion of STEM credits than the region and sector overall. This is reflective of the College’s strong engagement with the engineering, construction and environmental science sectors and key employer partners, including Nigg Skills Academy. Further growth is anticipated as opportunities to develop this niche provision emerge locally, regionally and nationally. A further priority will be to critically examine opportunities to build on other niche course provision (primarily Land based, Golf and Environmental Science) at both FE and HE level and to continue to closely collaborate with other UHI partners to create new programmes and maintain local access to learning opportunities that the College can’t provide independently.

2018-19 saw a drop in the number of credits delivered to learners from SIMD10, due to a significant review of our access (SCQF level 3/4) provision. Courses within the Easter Ross area were temporarily suspended, however refreshed provision is being introduced in November 2019. The college has seen increases in the number of students and volume of credits delivered to students with a disability and those coming from a care experienced background as a consequence of exploring options to create new opportunities to widen provision and access through working in partnership with local community groups and agencies and regional strategies to develop school-college provision.

***Retention***

Regionalisation of further education has continued to mature and the UHI partnership has continued to develop a strategic, collaborative approach to addressing the challenges the region faces. In 2018/19, the partnership collectively developed a regional strategy for the enhancement of student attainment to address challenges in attainment of mainstream and disadvantaged students and this is driving enhancement activity in 2019/20 at local and regional level.

Early indicators show a disappointing reduction in student retention for FT learners in 2018/19, which has impacted on overall attainment. Reasons for withdrawal are multiple and varied across programmes and include students entering employment, disciplinary issues and a variety of personal reasons. Support/tutor triage meetings were rolled out to more FT programmes and have assisted course teams and support staff to identify issues with individual students and target interventions at a much earlier point. Whilst this has been effective in improving retention in some courses, the impact has not been consistent across all programmes, despite close liaison between support staff and Personal Academic Tutors. This is reflective of the changing student demographic, with an increasing number of students coming to college with more complex and challenging needs/backgrounds including mental health and drug issues. The college is considering further how it can respond to these challenges within the challenging financial environment in which it is operating. One example of how the college is responding includes the piloting of a hybrid “learner development/support worker” role for full time FE programmes in Care at the Thurso campus for 2019/20.

College staff also participated, as part of the regional single policy project, in the development of a student attendance and engagement policy. The college successfully implemented an online attendance system which has resulted in modest efficiency gains and opportunities to improve attendance monitoring in line with implementing this policy locally. Work is continuing to improve reports to support this implementation.

The college has seen a 2% improvement in withdrawal rates across all PT learners. Revised admission and induction processes for school-based learners have had a positive impact on retention rates and have resulted in a 7.5% improvement in outcomes for PT senior phase pupils studying vocational qualifications.

The college has seen a slight drop in levels of attainment for FT FE learners aged 16-19 however, this remains higher than the sector and broadly on par with FT learners overall. Many of these young learners progress successfully from school college provision, particularly in engineering and construction subjects.

***Attainment***

As mentioned previously, college staff have actively engaged and participated in the development of the regional strategy to improve attainment for mainstream and disadvantaged learners. 2018/19 has shown a small decrease in FT attainment rates, which strongly correlate with the increases in withdrawal rates. Continued focus will be placed on implementing regional strategy at local level to drive enhancement activity in this area.

College staff have participated in regional activity to jointly evaluate subject performance indicators and monitoring KPIs for specific learner groups, including SIMD10 and Care experienced learners. In 2018/19, three subject areas with PIs lower than sector performance and in some cases varying performance across individual partners were selected for joint evaluation - Care, Computing and Hospitality. College staff joined curriculum teams across the partnership to evaluate provision and identify challenges faced. Teams valued the opportunity to share practice and ideas to enhance provision which informed local enhancement plans. These have included, for example, changes to programme design which have been implemented for 2019. As yet, it is too early to assess the impact of these changes.

Outcomes for FT care experienced learners have decreased significantly at local level and are linked to increases in local withdrawal rates. The support team were actively involved in the development of a regional strategy to improve outcomes for care experienced learners and have shared good practice in this area, however, further work is required to implement the strategy at local level.

Current systems for identifying and reporting on specific learner groups are resource intensive and work on developing regional systems to assist this has been delayed, but despite this our support teams have worked hard to provide the best service they can within the resource available. Further work is required to evaluate the staff resource and job roles required to enable the college to respond to increasing demand for support services within the financial resource it has available and to develop systems to identify, monitor and support individuals and a few learner groups who experience barriers to learning.

Detailed analysis of part time PIs has given an insight into key areas for improvement, a substantive component of which is school/college provision. Rates of partial success have increased significantly for a small number of school college programmes, resulting in a significant drop in PT attainment overall. Work at regional level to develop strategies for improving outcomes for care experienced and SIMD10 learners has shown that there is a wider attainment gap for school learners from these backgrounds and this is borne out by the drop in attainment for PT SIMD10 learners, compared to FT SIMD attainment which is on par with FT attainment overall. Focus on this area and implementing the regional attainment strategy will continue in 2019/20.

***Progression***

Almost all (94%) students with a confirmed destination progress in to work, apprenticeships or further study. The number of college students who progress into work has increased (41.5%) and is one of the highest in the sector, sitting 20 percentage points higher than sector average. Curriculum delivery models which focus on the development of essential skills and provide significant work experience either through work placement or realistic working environments contribute to this success. The college has continued to increase the number of programmes with substantial work experience as part of their programme of study, in line with the newly developed regional work experience strategy.

Successes in progression to employment and the increase in uptake in foundation apprenticeships and MAs has resulted in more limited progression to FT HE programmes. Consequently, the college is reviewing its HE curriculum to ensure it better matches the CPD requirements and delivery modes for those in employment.

The development of a regional Work Based Learning Hub and single contracts for Foundation, Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships has resulted in regional partners, within the scope of these contracts, working collaboratively to maximise contract size and value, placing apprenticeships according to demand rather than historic academic partner practice. In 2018/19, the college saw continued growth in the number of students on Modern Apprenticeships (156) through its partnership with employers, SDS and DYW North Highland; and benefitted from the regional approach when it required to increase the number of MA places mid-year due to employer demand.

As part of the regional harmonisation of quality arrangements, college staff have worked extensively with partner colleagues to develop a regional strategy to improve response and satisfaction rates for the Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey and develop regional benchmarks. Despite doubling increases in response rates, there has been a slight drop in overall college satisfaction rates to 94%. This remains an area for development identified in the college enhancement plan.