

# College Progress Visit Report

## West Highland College UHI

October 2019

<b>College Principal</b>	Lydia Rohmer
<b>Date of Progress Visit</b>	18-19 September 2019
<b>College Nominee</b>	Fiona Grant
<b>Managing Inspector</b>	John Bowditch
<b>College HM Inspector</b>	Margaret Rose Livingstone
<b>SFC Outcome Agreement Manager</b>	Seamus Spencer
<b>Outcome of Progress Visit</b>	<b>Satisfactory Progress</b>

## Background and context

### The college and its context

West Highland College UHI is one of thirteen University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) partner colleges operating in a multi college regional structure through a single outcome agreement. The college was created in 2010 and operates through ten college centres in a remote, rural and economically challenging environment. The college has strong connections with local and regional partner agencies and works closely with community planning partnerships at both strategic and operational level. College managers and staff work extensively in regional Further Education (FE) activity and have participated in the new regional strategy and policy groups throughout the year, leading a number of these. Senior managers are also active committee members on UHI groups, ensuring that the college is very well placed to shape regional strategy, policy and enhancement work. The college delivers a fully, tertiary curriculum aligned to the economic skills needs of the region and local employer needs.

### Purpose of the progress visit

In 2018, all colleges produced an Evaluative Report and Enhancement Plan (EREP) which were endorsed by Education Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). During Progress Visits (PV) colleges demonstrate how well they are delivering on the targets and milestones identified in their Enhancement Plans (EP). They allow colleges opportunities to outline any changes to their circumstances resulting in revisions to their original objectives. PVs provide reassurance to key stakeholders on the effectiveness of improvement actions undertaken by individual colleges. Whilst undertaking PVs, HM Inspectors of Education take account of the context and individual nature of each college.

## Overall judgement regarding progress

At the end of the PV, HM Inspectors of Education and Associate Assessors review the evidence gathered during their discussions with college managers, staff, learners and stakeholders. They assess the progress that colleges have made against their EPs, taking account of any changes to local circumstances. Based on this evidence, the team will form a view as to whether the college has made satisfactory progress against its EP or has not made satisfactory progress against its EP. This outcome is contained within this report with accompanying commentary to support the findings.

The endorsed EREP for West Highland College UHI can be found at:

<https://education.gov.scot/other-sectors/further-education/688503>

There are nine strategic actions and steps identified by the college in its EP for 2018-19. The college has organised these actions under the following six themes:

- Quality enhancement
- Curriculum design principles
- Staff development
- Student engagement
- Stakeholder engagement
- Digital college

The college has also carried out a matching exercise of actions against each of the Quality Indicators (QI) in the quality improvement framework for Scotland's colleges: How good is our college? and a number of the actions are relevant to more than one QI.

# Findings from the progress visit

## Quality enhancement

### EP actions were:

- Further refine approaches in self-evaluation (in line with region) to strengthen the planning, monitoring and completion of improvement actions and relevant professional development activity.
- Further refine approaches in self-evaluation to strengthen the planning, monitoring and completion of improvement actions to include a plan for Quality Enhancement Dialogues (QED) across all corporate areas of the college.

### Area of positive progress

- The college has been proactive in refining its approaches to self-evaluation to strengthen the planning and completion of improvement actions and associated professional development activities. It has introduced additional QED to support programme areas where issues have been identified, particularly in relation to retention and attainment. These additional QEDs have been welcomed by the teams involved and provide a joined up approach to support teams to explore potential contributing factors and suggest actions to address issues. In addition, the QEDs have been brought forward from September to June. This enables actions to be implemented timeously at the start of the new academic year.

### Area of further progress and actions required

- None identified.

## Curriculum design principles

### EP action was:

- Refresh the set of principles around the design and delivery of learning and support for learning, (referring to new professional standards) including: the approach for graduate attributes and essential skills; the assessment and feedback methodology; and curriculum design.

### Areas of positive progress

- Staff have reviewed the college principles for the design and delivery of its curriculum. Curriculum teams articulate clearly the key drivers that are considered when reviewing and designing curriculum. Local and regional Labour Market Intelligence is used routinely, and this is aligned well to regional and national priorities. Teams make good use of the wider UHI subject networks to share and explore future curriculum developments. Teams have also been reviewing the delivery of programmes to determine the most useful approaches to best suit specific groups of learners. This includes the timing of programmes to fit around seasonal work patterns, travel

arrangements and domestic circumstances. The college approach to blended-learning, including the use of distance and on-line learning, is routinely considered during planning.

- College staff have been successfully reviewing the provision of services to support learners to further improve retention and attainment rates and has effective systems in place which support learners well. Learners engage well with learning centre staff to access support and a range of useful services. Staff are continuing to implement the 'Guidance Model' for FE learners following a pilot with groups of learners last year. This is providing a structured approach to guidance and is being received well by learners.

### **Area of further progress and actions required**

- None identified.

## **Staff development**

### **EP actions were:**

- Implement planned and targeted staff development and training aligned to new refreshed teaching standards.
- Implement a targeted leadership development programme to reinforce capacity in management across all areas, aligned to new refreshed teaching standards and Investors In People recommendations.

### **Areas of positive progress**

- The college recognises the importance of targeted staff development activities to support and further enhance staff skills. Many staff describe regular review meetings where Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) is discussed and planned. All staff are encouraged to take personal responsibility for CLPL but are also made aware of opportunities, which might be of interest to them, by their managers. Recent all-staff sessions on mental health were well received by staff and additional associated CLPL was made available to staff. Staff highly valued these. CLPL included a well-planned mix of self-directed training (e.g. on domestic violence) and college-directed training (e.g. customer service skills).
- The college has begun to signpost to all teaching staff the revised professional standards for lecturers. Information sessions involving the College Development Network are helping raise teaching staff awareness of the revised standards and staff acknowledge their potential usefulness in reviewing their learning and teaching. Staff are relaxed talking about learning and teaching and are used to engaging in professional dialogue with colleagues to reflect on its effectiveness.
- Managers benefited from useful targeted leadership development to enhance their skills and reinforce capacity. This has been well-received and the approach was particularly welcomed by staff new in post. For example, priority workload training and managing virtual teams were two areas that staff found immediately useful.

## Area of further progress and actions required

- Although staff are aware of the revised professional standards for lecturers, many are still unsure about how the standards might be used routinely to support them to review the quality of their learning and teaching. Understandably, this is still work in progress given the newness of the standards.

## Student engagement

### EP action was:

- Finalise strategy for student engagement.

### Area of positive progress

- The college has a well thought out strategy for student engagement aimed at empowering learners in shaping their own learning and college experience. The level of engagement in electing the Highlands and Islands Students' Association (HISA) Depute President tripled last year from 64 votes in 2018 to 169 votes in 2019. HISA were involved in the creation of the strategy and are involved in the implementation. They attended both internal consultation days and the Board of Management development day.

### Area of further progress and actions required

- None identified.

## Stakeholder engagement

### EP actions were:

- Continue to strengthen and develop our school college partnership work at a local, partnership and regional level to support the delivery of the local and national Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) priorities.
- Enhance the college-wide approach and system for employer engagement to strengthen input within curriculum planning and the design of learning.

### Areas of positive progress

- The college continues to strengthen and develop further its school/college partnership work. School partners speak positively about the relationship and the willingness of the college to consider curriculum requests. All the partners acknowledge the benefits to their Senior Phase learners from the broadening of subject choice that college programmes are able to offer. This includes face-to-face delivery, and some programmes delivered by remote using technology. The college is also responsive to supporting schools with curriculum delivery in areas where teacher shortages exist.

- The college is a key partner locally in driving forward the ambitions of DYW. The college works well with the local DYW Co-ordinator for the West Highlands. Partners acknowledge the skilful and energetic work of the college Vice Principal in chairing the local DYW Operational Partnership Group and providing effective leadership to make progress with the local and national DYW agenda.
- Staff are currently working successfully with a wide range of employers across many different industry sectors. Employer views are sought routinely by curriculum staff during work placement and experience visits and these views help identify current and future employer needs. Targeted work with employers in specific areas is ongoing. For example, in response to the hospitality industry on Skye, hospitality learners were involved in the 'Skye on a Plate' event that provided learners with the opportunity to demonstrate their skills in a food competition and also take part in masterclasses by local well-known chefs. The event also provided the opportunity for the college to engage with local hospitality businesses and explore future training and skills requirements.
- The college is currently putting in place a new recording and monitoring system for employer engagement. Going forward, this will provide more systematic and comprehensive coverage and will allow managers to use it more strategically for reporting and planning activities.

#### **Area of further progress and actions required**

- None identified.

### **Digital college**

#### **EP action was:**

- Establish a college digital strategy including plans for wide use of new learning environment Brightspace.

#### **Area of positive progress**

- The college is currently consulting with staff and stakeholders around its digital strategy including how it might inform learning and teaching and approaches to delivery. The new UHI-wide virtual learning environment (VLE), Brightspace, is at an early stage of implementation but college Brightspace champions have made good progress in communicating the transition to staff and are rebuilding a new VLE presence on a new platform in some areas. All staff are aware of the college's aspirations and targets for the roll out of Brightspace. Despite being at an early stage in its introduction, most staff appreciate the potential.

#### **Area of further progress and actions required**

- None identified.

## What happens next?

The progress visit report will be shared with SFC, the college Board (and in multi-college regions, the Regional Strategic Body). The outcomes of the PV will inform a refreshed Evaluative Report and Enhancement Plan (2020-23) due to be submitted by all colleges in October 2020.

Dr John Bowditch  
HM Inspector