



West Highland College UHI
Estates Strategy 2021 - 24

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1. Introduction

Our vision is to be the education provider of choice in the West Highlands, delivering excellence in learning and training. Our estate also presents opportunities to engage with our communities, provide access to employment and develop and strengthen the local economy. The overarching West Highland College UHI (WHC) strategy has five underpinning aims:

- To **ensure** the right learning is delivered in the right place
- To **deliver** excellent learning for all
- To **enhance** the well-being of our communities
- To **enable and support** digital transformation
- To **champion** action to tackle climate change

Our estates and infrastructure aims are to:

- provide a high quality learning and working environment which enhances the student experience and meets the needs of staff.
- provide a resilient ICT infrastructure which supports the needs of students, curriculum delivery and a distributed workforce as well as the requirements of hybrid working.
- develop a whole college approach to providing a sustainable estate which is fit for purpose and reduces our carbon footprint.

This strategy is the framework for achieving those aims. It is founded on key themes which are appropriate to, and essential for, successful outcomes for students, staff and the wider community. These themes are:

- Creating access and opportunity
- Meet the learning and teaching needs of the college and its community – we aim to inspire.
- Providing value for money in new investments and whole life-cycle
- Facilities built and operated ensuring that environmental sustainability and contribution to Net Zero are included.
- Space managed to maximise utilisation

2. Background

In 2020, WHC celebrated 10 years of delivering learning and teaching in the West Highlands, operating in rural and often remote areas, serving small communities that are distant from main centres, both in terms of geography and transport. Our estate comprises ten different locations with two sizeable campuses in Fort William and Portree and other facilities ranging from purpose-built campuses to shared premises within community centres. Occupation terms range from ownership to leased.

WHC ICT facilities are generally of a high standard with all locations having access to digital infrastructure necessary for blended learning delivery, although challenges remain around broadband capacity within some of the centres.

Our future development plans include the provision of a STEM centre in Fort William, relocation in Mallaig and a second student residence in Fort William.

See Appendix I for details of the current estate.

3. Curriculum

The WHC curriculum strategy is a key driver for our estate aspirations. Currently going through a refresh, the curriculum strategy details the areas for development in the next 3-5 years. These are:

3.1 Continued Development of the STEM curriculum enabling expansion of engineering, construction, digital and health programmes.

3.2 Strengthen Tourism and Hospitality provision establishing a collaborative industry sector group working with existing connections such as Skye Connect, Lochaber Chamber of Commerce, FSB and HIE.

3.3 Strengthen and diversify the Adventure Curriculum continuing to attract UK and international markets and offering a diverse adventure tourism programme that is high quality and reactive to current and future market demand.

3.4 Growth of work-based learning, business training and CPD including the increasingly relevant industry 4.0 training and micro credentials

3.5 School-College Partnerships continuing the close partnership work and ongoing development of Highland Senior Phase between the three UHI partners and the Highland Council.

3.6 Enhancement of curriculum delivery (i) taking cognisance of the College's Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2022-2027, the importance of the linkages between curriculum and research are acknowledged, with potential benefits for both staff and students. (ii) increasing the provision of courses that can be delivered fully online, using online classroom technology and the virtual learning environment as well as different blends of practical learning.

4. Estates Strategy

4.1 Our Goal is to develop and maintain facilities providing fit for purpose accommodation which enables blended teaching and learning across a wide geographic area.

4.2 The Scope of the strategy is the college estate including digital connectivity.

4.3 Our core principles are:

- To provide an environment which meets the flexible needs of learning and teaching.
- To create access and opportunity across our geographical base.
- To contribute to the achievement of Net Zero.
- To provide value for money
- To deliver excellent facilities management
- Continual review

4.4 Our approach will be:

- To regularly review our customer base to ensure that our facilities are located where there is a demonstrable need or opportunity. Facilities will be designed to be flexible to ensure that they can meet the changing learning and teaching needs of curriculum and methods of delivery and accommodate changing circumstances as these arise.
- Post covid we will ensure that WHC staff can continue to work flexibly and that our facilities enable hybrid working.
 - All estate development will require a demonstrable business case as its foundation. This will include how it meets the teaching and learning needs, a robust financial case demonstrating affordability, and its importance to delivering the college's plans. Interior and exterior design will aim to inspire users to excel, striking a balance with affordability. On-going planning and development will be carried through with sufficient flexibility to meet the changing needs of students and staff by contributing to the review of current plans for the development of the physical learning environment against the key strategic goals and objectives of *Excellence For All*.
 - As befits an organisation which is concerned with sustainability, all building design will be informed by the most recent research on achieving low-energy, low carbon- footprint, sustainable buildings.
 - Where we create a new facility, our choice of location should include investigating opportunities for collaboration and/or co-location. Our design methods should ensure that we achieve maximum space utilisation, based on SFC guidelines and we will always work to reduce our carbon footprint. Our procurement methods should achieve value for money in the design, construction and operation of new facilities. Existing facilities will be reviewed to identify more effective means of operation.
 - We will ensure that maintenance, health and safety, environmental and other legislative requirements are planned for and reviewed. We will plan timetabling and record usage to identify opportunities for more effective utilisation of space.
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Appendix I details the current WHC estate.

5. Future Need

5.1 The future estate needs of WHC are based on areas of curriculum which are growing or contracting and the WHC aspiration to ensure that the student and staff experience is consistently good irrespective of location.

5.2 A continued area of curriculum growth continues to be in STEM subjects. While the area of STEM in education is not new, its importance has come to the fore over recent years. The Scottish Government published its STEM strategy in October 2017. The Strategy aims to build Scotland's capacity to deliver excellent STEM learning, and to close equity gaps in participation and attainment in STEM. It also aims to inspire young people and adults to study STEM, and to provide a better connection between STEM education and training and the needs of the labour market in Scotland. The WHC estates strategy 2018-21 included plans to construct a centre for STEM, digital and health subjects at Blar Mor in Fort William. The Full Business Case for this project was approved by the SFC in 2018 and the project is shovel ready with planning permission and building warrant. WHC

continues to work with UHI, SFC and the Scottish Government to realise the funding for this key project.

In 2019, WHC was successful in its bid to establish a centre for Advancing Manufacturing. This £1.3m demonstration project has brought Industry 4.0 equipment and expertise to the area. The project is currently located in a leased building in Fort William and the team are working with local businesses on individual projects. It is anticipated that the equipment and projects associated with Advancing Manufacturing will relocate to the STEM centre once built.

5.3 WHC leads the way in Adventure Tourism curriculum and the construction of the STEM centre will release space in the main Fort William campus for the Adventure Tourism department to expand its local, regional and international offering.

5.4 WHC recognises the continuing changing learning environment in terms of online and blended learning opportunities and will review its estate portfolio to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

5.5 WHC also seeks to ensure that we offer a suitable and enjoyable student learning environment and in the majority of locations we are able to do that. Our Mallaig Learning Centre currently operates from three, separately leased locations – three rooms in the Mallaig Community Centre and two elderly Highland Council units. None of these spaces offer our students an acceptable learning environment in terms of the College or UHI Student experience requirements and there is no room for expansion to meet future demands. That said, our Mallaig Learning Centre, which is accredited by the RYA, has built up a specialism in maritime studies offering full-time courses (Maritime Skills Certificate and Shipping & Maritime Operations) as well as a range of part-time RYA and MCA courses. Progression for our Mallaig students is excellent:

- 87% of our students are either in work or study 6 months after leaving their course.
- 100% of our students on the Certificate in Maritime Skills either progress to the next level course or into work
- 97% of students on the Certificate in Shipping and Maritime Operations gain employment with organisations such as Caledonian MacBrayne or cadet/apprenticeships for the wider merchant fleet.

WHC has developed a business case to establish a new Learning Centre in Mallaig to create a centre of excellence in Marine and Maritime training where we see a clear synergy between location and courses. The project is shovel ready with Planning Permission and Building warrant in place.

5.6 UHI currently manages student residences in Fort William. These enjoy high occupancy rates and there is a need for additional student accommodation in the town. During the life of this strategy, we will work with colleagues in UHI to build a business case for this accommodation.

6. Key performance indicators

- **Estate condition**
During 19/20 we carried out a condition survey of the main campus building and have a detailed report on issues to be addressed. During 22/23 we will look to undertake further surveys on our wider estate and put in place a small works improvement programme which will run alongside major developments.
- **Space efficiency**
Over the period of the strategy, we will work towards the SFC guidelines for space efficiency.
- **Fitness for purpose**
We will aim to achieve an increase in satisfaction levels in our annual survey of staff and students on fitness for purpose, starting from a baseline survey in session 2010/11. In this we will recognise that four of our centres in Fort William, Mallaig, Broadford and Portree are home to our full-time HE/FE students.

7. Consultation

The WHC Estates strategy is absolutely aligned with our Curriculum Strategy. Both of these areas of work include consultation with local and national stakeholders including Highland Council, HIE, SFC, UHI and local/regional employers. The consultations will continue during the life of this strategy as we deliver our estates aspirations. In particular, we will identify key stakeholders with whom we can work on individual estates projects, ensuring joint working where possible.