

North Highland College UHI (NHC) Learner Engagement Strategy

Strategy Statement – Purpose and Aims

“Our learner engagement strategy aims to ensure that, in all its endeavours, the college empowers its learners to take control of their own learning, to enhance their own learning and the wider work and life of the college, and to have a positive impact on the future of our learning community.”

It is hoped, in turn, that this will:-

- enable learners to develop as co-creators of their educational experience
- enable learners to develop as individuals by building their personal confidence, self esteem and motivation as well as encouraging them to develop an interest and commitment to the wider college and local community
- enable learners to develop citizenship, employability and enterprise skills
- have a positive impact on the future of the college’s learning community
- improve the learner experience
- improve learner behaviour, retention and attainment

As such this strategy takes account of the Government’s proposals in *A Curriculum for Excellence* and the Scottish Funding Council’s (SFC) *“Council guidance to colleges on quality”* (Circular SFC/33/2008) and the 3 key principles of *High quality learning, Learner engagement and Quality culture in External quality arrangements for Scotland’s colleges updated August 2013* (Education Scotland).

Definition and Scope

For the purposes of this strategy, **learner engagement** is defined as:-

“those activities which allow learners to co-create their learning experience and involve them in all aspects of college decision making.”

Although, learner engagement can also be defined as *“the wide range of activities that seek to enable, equip and motivate all learners to voice their views and actively shape and enhance their own learning, that of other learners and the work and life of the college”* (LSC, 2007), learner engagement is much more than this.

Learner engagement should allow learners to co-create their learning experience and seek to involve them in all aspects of college decision making. Therefore, it will depend on negotiation, consultation and dialogue with learners. Learner engagement is not a passive exercise but one that involves **all** learners initiating, developing and assessing their own learning and learning experience, whatever their race, gender, sexual orientation, faith, belief, age or disability and regardless of their mode of attendance. Whilst it is the college’s aspiration that all learners are fully involved in this strategy, it is recognised, that for some learners, e.g. online, part time, evening, block release, this presents a challenge. For these learners, the expectation is that the strategy will be implemented as far as is applicable, relevant and practicable to

their programme of study, taking account of aspects such as their mode of attendance and/or mode of delivery.

However, learner engagement is also as much about the culture and values of the college and how it communicates and demonstrates its commitment to learner engagement. As such it involves **all** college staff, regardless of role and contractual status.

Responsibility

The responsibility for overseeing the development and maintenance of this strategy lies with the Quality and Learner Engagement Coordinator. Significant amendments to the strategy require the approval of the SMT, NHC Learning Teaching and Quality Committee and the NHC Learner Council. The NHC Board of Management Learning, Teaching and Research Committee will also be advised of any significant amendments made. The strategy will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis in accordance with operational and strategic planning requirements.

Baseline Review

A number of established formal and informal mechanisms existed in college to facilitate learner engagement at the time of the baseline review in 2010-11. This included:-

- Learner surveys and questionnaires at unit, programme and college level
- Course representative system
- Course team meetings
- Learner focus groups at college level and section level
- Mentor sessions with subject tutors, course leaders/student advisors, guidance staff and Support for Learners staff
- Personal development plans and portfolios
- Opportunities in class for learners to participate in a range of citizenship, employability and enterprise initiatives, which promote the development of learners' essential skills and address key college enhancement themes
- Informal and formal meetings with academic and support staff
- College self evaluation processes
- Learner membership of the college Board of Management
- College complaints and commendations procedure

Whilst many examples of good practice existed, the extent of learner engagement in the implementation of these mechanisms was not consistent or sufficiently systematic or robust across all college curriculum sections and was limited in some support sections. This is reflected in the HMIE annual engagement visit reports of 2009 and 2010 e.g. “*..learner representatives feel uncomfortable raising issues ...they perceive themselves to be on the periphery of decision making*” Education Scotland AEV Report (2009)

Implementation of the Strategy Statement

The college is committed to implementing the above strategy statement by building on its existing formal and informal learner engagement mechanisms and further developing all aspects of learner engagement. Details of what this includes and how this will be done follow:-

a) Formal Learner Representation, Development, Training and Support

- Learners on all full time programmes will elect a minimum of one course representative, however it is recommended that two are elected to communicate learner opinion and inform course review.
- Course representatives will be full members of course teams and will attend course team meetings and participate in course monitoring and self evaluation activities.
- In 2015, the college signed up as a full member of the Regional Highland and Islands Students Association (HISA). The college will continue to be supportive of the further development and operation of an effective H&I Students' Association and conduct annual elections for Executive Officers and the NHC Depute President position. These posts will be elected by learners,
- All learners will automatically become members HISA on enrolment at NHC.
- The North Highland College HISA Depute President will serve as a full member on the college's Board of Management.
- Course representatives will be invited to stand for the post of the second learner Board of Management member and will be elected by their course representative peers.
- The NHC HISA Depute President and second learner member will be supported by the Quality and Learner Engagement Coordinator, HISA, the Chair of the Board of Management and Secretary to the Board in relation to Board activities.
- Learner representatives will be sought to serve on all college committees and short life working groups.
- Learner representatives will meet in advance with the Quality and Learner Engagement Coordinator and/or the Chair of the college committee on which they serve to be briefed on their role in the committee and to identify and discuss opportunities for their personal development.
- The college will constitute a learner council where all course representatives will meet monthly with the Principal, Director of Learning and Teaching, Quality and Learner Engagement Coordinator and other senior support managers as required to promote the learner voice on cross college matters.
- Learner representatives will be invited to attend appropriate college management meetings where items are likely to be of interest.
- The college will provide appropriate training opportunities and support for learner representatives and the student association/learner council in liaison with SPARQs (Student Participation in Quality Scotland) and NUS (National Union of Students) to encourage and develop learner engagement.
- The college will appoint a staff-student liaison officer. This is currently the Quality and Learner Engagement Coordinator. This individual will provide support to the NHC HISA Depute President in discharging their role, act as a link with college

staff, advise on the development of the student association/learner council and act as a conduit for raising immediate feedback.

- The college will encourage learners to participate in internal/external discussions with key stakeholders and internal/external events e.g. conferences, exhibitions and competitions, careers events, induction activities.
- The college sees the promotion of learner engagement as requiring the creation of an empowering environment and attitude in both staff and students. For this reason, in implementing this strategy, the college will take steps to provide appropriate training for staff as well as students in order to support and promote all aspects of learner engagement.
- The college will promote the learner voice and provide information on course and college committee representation at induction.
- The college will promote the college and UHI complaints and commendations procedure to learners at induction and the UHI Red Button service.

b) Planning, Reviewing and Improving the Learner Experience

- Learner course representatives will gather feedback from course groups using course unit evaluation (CUE) questionnaires.
- Learner course representatives will participate in course team meetings, course monitoring and self evaluation activities to communicate learner opinion and inform quality improvement.
- College staff will engage with learners and use their feedback to inform the full range of college self evaluation processes – course monitoring activities, self evaluations (curriculum and support), peer review, operational plans (curriculum and support) and strategic planning.
- Learner feedback will be gathered through the annual early experience and pre-exit student surveys. Specific questionnaires will be used from time to time to gather learner feedback on cross college services and activities and new initiatives. This will allow a wider feedback base on improving services.
- Focus groups with groups of learners, Quality and Learner Engagement Coordinator and/or Marketing Department and/or other staff/managers as appropriate will be held to seek feedback on initial college experiences, support services, the learning and teaching experience, college resources etc. These will be held periodically during the session. The Marketing Department will also establish specific focus groups to sample the experience of learners where it is often difficult to get feedback, primarily evening class and satellite campuses.
- College staff will work with HISA representatives to develop the annual student partnership agreement. The NHC HISA Depute President and Quality and Learner Engagement Coordinator will plan and develop local learner engagement activities in line with those outlined within the partnership agreement.
- The college will impact assess college self evaluation processes and associated documentation to ensure specific evaluation of learner engagement at both lesson, course and department level. This will include e.g. course monitoring and peer review processes.

c) Communications

- Learner representatives will receive minutes from all college committees of which they are members and feedback outcomes of meetings to class groups as appropriate.
- The Quality and Learner Engagement Officer, Course Representatives and Marketing Department will produce a quarterly electronic newsletter. This will provide all students with an update on actions being taken in response to suggestions, issues raised in focus groups, annual student surveys etc.
- The college Marketing Department and Quality and Learner Engagement Coordinator will produce a series of posters headed “You said....We did....” indicating examples of student feedback and the college response. This will provide information to staff and learners about actions the college has taken.
- The Marketing Department, Quality and Learner Engagement Coordinator and Curriculum Leader for Education will develop and implement a staff-learner communications strategy to facilitate dissemination of information to/feedback from current learners. This will include the use of the college intranet (Sharepoint), plasma screens at key points in college (e.g. reception), use of posters and noticeboards to promote events, the college website (including dedicated area for the student voice), management of a college Facebook page, student group emails, Freshers’ Fayre.
- The college has implemented the use of a text messaging service to assist communication with some groups of students. The college will investigate costs and benefits of implementing this service more widely to improve and extend communications with learners within other operational areas.
- HISA and Learner Council will work in partnership with college staff to promote feedback to learners in relation to issues raised
- An online suggestion service will be incorporated into the student voice area of the website.

d) The Learner Journey

- The college admissions process will provide learners with appropriate pre entry information to make informed choices based on individual learner needs. Learners who do not meet standard entrance requirements will be given the opportunity to discuss alternative programmes of study and/or additional support needs with appropriate college staff.
- All full time learners new to the college will undertake a diagnostic screening at induction or pre entry interview to identify any additional support needs.
- Full time learners without an SQA core skills profile will undergo core skills screening at induction or pre entry interview to identify core skills development requirements.
- Learners who require additional support will have access to and plan their support in liaison with Support for Learners staff
- Learners will meet regularly with course leaders or student advisor/Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) to reflect on their learning and measure their progress, making use of personal development plans or equivalent to set their own individual goals and record progress.

- Learners will have access to appropriate pre exit guidance opportunities with college staff and/or external agencies.
- In classes, tutors will be proactive in using a range of appropriate learning and teaching methods to enable learners to identify their preferred learning styles, to jointly plan appropriate learning and assessment opportunities and reflect on and evaluate their learning, both as individuals and with peers. This could include, for example, VARK questionnaires, oral questioning, traffic light system, reflective logs, comment boards, post it walls.
- Tutors will provide opportunities in class for learners to participate in a range of citizenship, employability and enterprise initiatives, which promote the development of learners' essential skills and address key college enhancement themes, e.g. curriculum for excellence, equality and diversity.
- College staff and learner representatives will work collaboratively to plan and provide opportunities for learners to participate in interdisciplinary learning and to identify and take advantage of opportunities to raise the college's profile and standing in the community e.g. marketing events, showcase events such as House of Morven shows, competitions, supporting local charities and community groups.
- College staff will work with the NHC Depute President to plan the annual Links2Life programme of activities which provide additional opportunities for learners out with class to assist them in their wider personal development and better prepare them for the world of work and the society we live in today e.g. citizenship, career management, and health and wellbeing activities.

The contents of this strategy are informed by key current and developing college policies. These policies are referenced below and should be referred to for further detailed guidance in relation to the above.

Review, evaluation and reporting

The Quality and Learner Engagement Coordinator and representatives from the student association/learner council shall co –write a learner engagement self evaluation report annually. This will evidence and evaluate the implementation of the learner engagement strategy and make recommendations for further development. This self evaluation report will be reviewed by representatives from the student association/learner council, SMT, Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee and the Board of Management Learning, Teaching and Research Committee

References

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (Education Scotland) (updated 2013) *External Quality Arrangements for Scotland's Colleges* at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/>

Learning and Skills Council (2007) *Developing a Learner Involvement Strategy* at <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/tutors/documents/nat-developingalearnerinvolvementstrategy-pu-feb2007.pdf>

Scottish Funding Council's (SFC) "*Council guidance to colleges on quality*" (Circular SFC/33/2008)

Related college policies and procedures

- UHI Learning and Teaching Strategy
- Course monitoring framework
- Programme design and approval
- Assessment for Certification
- Guidance services
- NHC Complaints and Commendations
- Admissions policy
- Communications strategy