UHI | MORAY MOIREIBH

Access and Inclusion Strategy

Responsibility:	Director of Information, Planning and Student Support
Approved by:	Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee
Reviewed:	May 2023
Date of Next Review:	May 2024

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1. Introduction

UHI Moray is committed to further developing its ethos and culture to ensure equality of opportunity for all students and potential students.

This strategy underpins the College's vision as stated within our Strategic Plan 2022-2027:

Our Vision is that we will be:

- *a destination of choice for students and staff*

- *a partner of choice for stakeholders, and*

- *widely recognised for our role in transforming lives, communities, and practice*

This vision encompasses the full range of learning, teaching and support services included within this strategy. The College's access and inclusion strategy continues to ensure an inclusive approach and in particular it re-establishes the College's aim to enhance existing inclusive practices to meet the needs of students ensuring parity of intake and outcome so that all students have an equal chance of successfully completing their programme of study.

Global Pandemic Impact

The pandemic of March 2020 had a significant impact, with College campuses closed and services adapting to new ways of working. For session 2022/23, staff attendance on-campus averages at around 70% during the working week and learners continue to adapt to blended learning approaches which were widely developed during the pandemic. Student services played a crucial role during the pandemic and although services have returned to normal on-campus, support continues to be available tvia video conference or telephone to those who need it.

These individual services all have specific aims and aspirations and progress is routinely monitored and reviewed. An overarching Action Plan for Session 2022/2023 is included in Appendix 4. These aims evolve as appropriate to reflect progress made, relevant national initiatives, affordability and to reflect the priorities of the College and its partners in addressing access and inclusion issues.

Access and inclusion priorities are also embedded within a wide range of other strategies, policies, procedures and operational plans as detailed in Appendix 1. The College is committed to further extending its evidence base in relation to this Strategy and its underlying policies and practice to ensure a more outcome driven approach. Analysis of student equal opportunities monitoring data, for example, provides the basis for ongoing self-evaluation.

The College has a key role in supporting those who wish to develop skills and attributes to allow them to participate fully in society and as such this role encompasses preventing individuals from becoming excluded and in providing opportunities for those excluded to overcome particular barriers.

The College recognises a wide range of issues and factors which can prevent a student or prospective student from realising their potential and provides a wide range of support services from pre-entry guidance to progression to study or employment. It would however be inappropriate for the College to provide expertise in all aspects of welfare, guidance and support and staff work in partnership with other external agencies to more widely meet the needs of individual students. The College sees its key contribution as the provision of educational opportunities working in partnership with agencies better placed to provide other support.   The impact of the global pandemic from March 2020 had a significant impact on the effectiveness of these partnerships and a key action within the strategy for this year is to ensure arrangements for partnership working are effective going forward.

This strategy is also informed by the longer-term planning and strategic aspirations of the Moray Community Planning Partnership on which Board a member of the college's Board of Management has a seat.

An exemplar list of external agencies and stakeholders the College engages with is included in Appendix 3.

2. Inclusive Practice

The College's aspirations and plans over recent years have been to ensure an inclusive approach to providing learning support and other services to all students on a needs-led basis. In recent years the College has evolved its learning support service from being a deficit model where learning support was only provided if a student indicated a requirement for support through either the application or enrolment process. This process was based on a Personal Learning Support Plan (PLSP) being developed and the agreed support being put in place. The College's current inclusive practice includes a 'one-stop shop' for all student services including guidance, counselling, employability skills, learning support, career advice, financial management support etc. and removes the stigma perceived by many in accessing support.

Improving the "triage service" within Student Services is a key development for 2023 and requires engagement with teaching staff to ensure they are aware of what services are available and how to refer students appropriately.

Pre-start

All applications are monitored to identify as early as possible any individual student support needs. These individuals are contacted by our Inclusive Learning Team to encourage applicants to discuss any support required to ensure that as much support as possible is in place prior to the start of the session.

The College has an inclusive approach to learning support and all applicants are communicated with in the summer, via online postcards etc., to inform them of all the opportunities available in the summer to seek support prior to the start of the session. This support extends to familiarisation tours and help with student support fund applications.

This communication is continued throughout the session via regular Newsletters however future developments include improving the accessibility of the wide range of online information available to applicants and ensuring that it is effectively informed by student experience and expectations.

The College's Kickstart programme is highly successful and offers a variety of learning support workshops in IT, numeracy, literacy, study skills etc. within the summer to those applicants who feel either unready or under-confident to start college. This programme has evolved over many years of feedback and is now recognised by all who attend it to be a useful aid prior to starting college.

Pre-start events provide applicants with an introduction to their course of choice and the student services on offer as well as ensuring that they are enrolled on the course that best suits their need and current qualification and skill level.

This practice is continually reviewed however it is recognised that pre-start support has played a significant role in improving student early retention and in previous years, it was a key factor in improved attainment.

For those students who find it difficult to engage with College, e.g. those who have a significant lack of confidence, suffer from anxiety or other mental health issues, a one-to-one pre-start experience is offered which individually supports the student to gain access to a College course.

Transition from School to College

Well-established practice exists to ensure effective transition from school to College and pupils are supported in a variety of ways from course choice onwards. The Head of Academic Partnerships oversees work with the local secondary schools and other

agencies, e.g. Skills Development Scotland and DYW Moray. Individual pupil needs, including care leavers and young carers, are met through a series of Pathway Planning Meetings.   Where a learning support need is identified the pupil is engaged with promptly to provide appropriate and continual support through the summer break.

These meetings facilitate data sharing including highlighting any perceived barriers to progress, e.g. lack of confidence, lack of motivation.

The College is making use of the Schools Data Hub to help inform leaver destinations and further discussion with SDS and other stakeholders is planned to lead to new data sharing agreements to help shape the College curriculum, and support functions through analysis of destination data.

Induction

All FE full-time students are invited to induction in late August. A structured induction programme has been in place for many years sets the standard where the focus is on ensuring that the College provides a welcoming environment to all students whilst providing further opportunities to signpost all the support services available and how to access them.

A key development for 2023 is to update the induction process and incorporate elements of the "10 steps of induction" piloted by Hair, Beauty and Complementary Therapy in session 22/23.   A more flexible approach is required and this will be built into the revised induction policy.

Senior managers have played an active part in welcoming and meeting the students at induction, but this was disrupted during the pandemic years. Re-starting this engagement and recruiting Student Helpers to ensure that students are engaged with and supported in this very busy period will be an action going forward.

A key change introduced in session 2017/18 was the introduction of the new Learner Development Worker (LDW) post which centralises the student advice provision within Student Services, removing the burden from teaching staff.   LDWs are introduced at induction and guide the student through to the end of their course and provide support for transition to the next step in their journey. A key action identified for 22/23 is the need to re-promote the the role of the LDWs to teaching staff.   This is to ensure that staff engage with LDWs on issues relevant to the LDW role and ensure staff are clear which other teams can respond to non-LDW related issues.

The LDW implementation was based on good practice established in other Colleges within the sector and better focuses resources on the non-academic needs of learners whilst complementing employability skills offered by academic teams.

The College conducts an annual Student Early Experience Survey covering the period from initial enquiry to four or five weeks into the course. This survey has around a thousand responses and routinely demonstrates a high level of student satisfaction. Class Representative meetings and focus groups further consider any specific areas for development to inform future induction planning.

<u>In session support</u>

Within our Student Support Services Centre, our Study Bar provides an open and welcoming environment for all students to access their individual learning support needs including study planning, study skills, numeracy, literacy, assistive technology support, etc. This ensures there is no differentiation between the existing 'extended learning support' and 'learning support' and that the service provided is student-focussed. This is also more effective where students do not initially recognise that they have a need or where they do not identify themselves as having a disability, e.g. mental health issues, dyslexia.

Over time the demographic of need has shifted from a need to support a physical impairment to providing more emotional and mental health support. This is evidenced by the trends in our student data and before the pandemic, the College opened an Empathy Bar to more directly support those students with mental health issues due to the significantly high number of students now declaring.

External funding currently supports 0.8 FTE of fully-qualified counsellors and plans are currently in progress to establish well-being services including re-establishing the "Wellbeing Bar" housed in a new dedicated location in College, offering the opportunity to bring in other third-sector providers from the local area, enhancing the services available to learners. This work was previously delayed by the pandemic.

There is a similar trend in those students who have dyslexia, both disclosed and un-disclosed and significant planning and staff CPD has been undertaken to support early identification.

Plans include improving the information to all staff to create more inclusive environments including engendering a better understanding about how to deliver more dyslexic or autistic friendly approaches, e.g. all assessments being printed on coloured paper for all students.

In 2014 the College achieved the Buttle Quality Mark for Care Leavers and the implementation and review of support for those students in and from a care background has led to not only a better understanding of the issues faced by those students but has also better informed the support provided to all students. A Corporate Parenting Plan is in place to continue to progress this work.

Workshops similar to the pre-start Kickstart programme are offered to all students throughout the session, and in particular to those students on SCQF Level 4 to 6 programmes. In addition, learning support may be provided in SCQF level 4 classes at the start of session.

Students with specific recognised needs identified at the pre-entry, application, induction or enrolment stage also access the Study Bar. Currently these students have negotiated and agreed PLSPs in place of which time in the Study Bar may be a component of these plans. It is intended in the future to continue the PLSP process for those students with complex needs, where one-to-one support is required, or for those where support may be provided from other areas within the College, e.g. Estates.

Inclusive Learning Team staff are trained in the use of assistive technologies and again the support provided has evolved from only supporting individual students with specific disabilities to promoting the benefits of assistive technologies to all students requesting support, e.g. Read Write Gold is beneficial to any student who requires to enhance their study skills.

More technical IT support is provided via the IT Service Desk and this service is more interactive enabling both phone and web-chat services direct to students.

The Inclusive Learning Team (ILT) supports core skills diagnostic testing and the outcomes from this informs both teaching staff and ILT staff to determine individual student needs and effective support mechanisms.

Students have access to a wide range of support via the Student Services Centre including employability support through the Career Zone.   LDWs and other student services staff provide signposting of services and a variety of themed sessions are delivered to all FE class groups.

PDP resources are also available online for students to access at a time that suits their needs.

3. Evaluation and Planning of Student Services

The evaluation of all student services is underpinned by a variety of sources of information including analysis of student data, survey responses and individual feedback on the implementation of the associated policies and procedures.

For example, students participate in the review and development of all student related policies and strategies through a series of meetings organised by the Student Association. The two local Depute Presidents of the Highlands and Islands Student Association (HISA) not only participate in the associated committees but also work closely with the Student Services team.

Students who engage in the Kickstart Programme and those who use the Study Bar also participate in focus groups to support evaluation and planning. Statistics related to study bar use were used during learning and teaching evaluation sessions in session 2017/18 to aid the development of the College Evaluation Review and Enhancement Report (EREP).

Work remains in progress to develop a more outcome oriented approach to student services planning and to ensure that it is informed by effective analysis of student impact and outcomes including volume of students accessing learning support, retention and attainment performance indicator analysis by age, course level studied, disability (disclosed and undisclosed) etc. An action has been created to ensure the relevant KPIs are identified and this closely links to the EREP report and the challenge questions outlined in *How Good is our College?*

The quantity and quality of our student post-course destination information is improving, but more work is still required to help better improve learners outside of the SDS data sharing framework, specifically learners who apply but then who do not enrol.

Service Development 2023/24

The Student Services Centre and Inclusive Learning Team have been central to developing inclusive practice across College. For session 2023/24, a proposal for a new combined Student Support Service under 1 service lead bringing together other key staff has been developed. This will have a number of advantages:

- Admissions, Student Finance and Inclusive Learning Team will join student services, bringing the service under one manager, enabling more effective co-ordination between staff dealing with front line support queries and back-office staff involved in processing.
- Counselling and wellbeing services will come together under the new service, enabling better co-ordinated development of services and engagement with 3rd party service providers.

4. Responsibilities

The Strategic Leadership Team and Board of Management have overall responsibility for fostering a culture within the organisation which values and embeds the aims and ambitions of this Strategy.

The Director of Information, Planning and Student Support has responsibility for the development and on-going review of this Strategy.

The Director of Information, Planning and Student Support is also responsible for ensuring that student services policies and procedures take account of the full range of needs of students and potential students.

The Learning Support Co-ordinator and Student Support Services Manager are responsible for developing the associated annual Action Plans and for ensuring that our student services are regularly reviewed.   These will be combined into a new single service plan for 23/24.

Managers are responsible for raising awareness of the various aspects of access and inclusion issues and ensuring that both teaching and student-facing support staff make an appropriate contribution to the College's overall approach to improving access and widening inclusion.

All staff have a responsibly to undertake appropriate continuous professional development. For example, the Inclusive Learning Team have developed a training program including:

- Counselling Skills, active listening is essential when supporting students who are suffering from anxiety and or depression
- Autism
- Dyslexia
- Advancing Equality and Diversity through Inclusiveness
- Mental Health First Aid
- Mental Health First Aid for youths
- Sleep deprivation – the affects
- Sensory Impairment Training

5. UHI Partnership Policy Development

In 2018, the UHI Partnership started work on creation of the *Single Policy Environment* project which is designed to bring together best practice and establish a common policy framework within the FE region.   There are now regular updates from the group which brings together the best practice from around the partnership.

The action plan re-states the commitment to continue to support and improve practice in College through the use of consistent policies and procedures to support access and inclusion.

6. Constraints

The major constraint to continuous improvement of student support services is the level of targeted funding available for these services. Funding allocations within the region now cap the amounts previously claimed for learning support to ensure a more equitable distribution of funding across the region. In this context the college continues to strive to ensure the sustainability of the services we provide and our improvement planning.

The proposed changes to develop a single service for student-facing staff will continue to ensure service is provided on a sustainable basis.

The service continues to meet a wide range of specific learner needs with the PLSP remaining critical to ensure the right support is tailored for each learner.

Appendix 1: Related Internal Documents

- Academic Quality Policy
- Complaints Procedure (UHI Partnership)
- Course Assessment and Progression Board Procedures
- Equalities Mainstreaming Report
- Equality and Diversity Policy (UHI Partnership Policy)
- Extended Learning Support Procedures
- FE Admissions Policy (UHI Partnership Policy)
- FE Student Funding Policy inc. attendance (UHI Partnership Policy)
- FE Student Support Funds Policy
- Learner Support Policy (UHI Partnership Policy)
- Learning and Teaching Strategy
- Mainstreaming Equalities Report
- Promoting a Positive Learning Environment (UHI Partnership Policy)
- Safeguarding Policy and Procedure (UHI Partnership)
- Student Bullying & Harassment Policy
- Student Confidentiality Policy
- Student Disclosure Policy (UHI Partnership)
- Student Induction Policy

Appendix 2:   Related External Documents

- Gender Action Plan
- The Education (Additional Support for Learning (Scotland))
- Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)
- Highlands and Islands Regional Outcome Agreement
- Moray Community Planning Partnership Strategic Plan: Moray 2026
- National Ambition for Care Experienced Students
- Opportunities for All
- Youth Employment Strategy

Appendix 3: Stakeholders and External Agencies

- Through Care After Care
- Skills Development Scotland
- Action for Children
- School Liaison Officer
- Employment Support Services
- Job Centre Plus
- Beech Brae Education Centre (Inclusion and Support Service)
- Foster Care
- Who Cares Scotland (WCS)
- Aberlour Mentoring
- Kinship Care

Moray Community Planning Partnership Committees and Groups:

- Community Engagement Group
- Prevention Group
- Prevent Group
- Children and Young Persons Partnership
- Mental Health and Well-Being Group
- Corporate Parenting Board

Appendix 4: Action Plan

New action plan

No.	Aim/Target	Key Task	Lead Responsibility	Target date	Progress
1	**STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES**				
1.1	Promote the LDW Role to Teaching Staff to ensure expectations about what the role entails is clear.	Develop a short presentation for staff development week which promotes the role of the LDWs and provide examples of scenarios where LDWs can add specific value to the student experience.	LDW Team	August 2023	
1.2	Ensure the "Triage Service" is well documented and signposted to all staff with the aim of ensuring referrals to student services appropriate and reach the right staff.	Document the triage service on a page and share this widely with staff, including all management meetings.	Student Support Services Manager (SSSM)	August 2023	
1.3	The pilot induction process implemented by the UNITED team in session 22/23 should be rolled out College-wide.	Make the "10 steps of induction" official induction policy, but allow teaching teams to customise which elements are relevant for each subject area.	DIPSS	June 2023	To be approved June 2023 LQTC.
1.4	Redevelop student services to bring student facing roles under one team to strengthen the "one stop shop" approach.	Develop and implement a plan for the single student service.	DIPSS	June 2023	Proposals issued to the Joint Consultative Committee on 21st April 2023.

No.	Aim/Target	Key Task	Lead Responsibility	Target date	Progress
1.5	Policy improvement	Continue to participate in UHI partnership policy and procedure developments with the aim of improving practice and services to students.	SSSM	July 2024	
1.6	Remove physical barriers at the start of the session by re-introducing the use of student helpers during induction to help break down barriers during the first week of term.	Plan and recruit student helpers during induction week to support students into and around the building during induction. Senior managers to participate to provide a welcome to students each morning.	SSSM	July 2023	
2	**INCLUSIVE LEARNING TEAM**				
2.1	Implement the wellbeing bar and incorporate external service providers as part of the offering to students.	With C007 now ring-fenced, bring forward plans to open the facility and timetable in the services of external service providers to supplement the work of support staff.	Learning Support Manager	August 2023	
2.2	Reduce the significant burden created by the PLSP interview process to better direct resources to those most in need and maximise the use of on-line self-help tools and services.	Consider ways of signposting support early, enabling priority PLSPs to be developed and ensuring students able to access self-help early in the session to mitigate the demands of the service.	Learning Support Manager	August 2023	
2.3	Ensure the role of the learning support worker is better understood by staff	Develop a short presentation for staff development week which clearly outlines the role	Learning Support Manager	August 2023	

No.	Aim/Target	Key Task	Lead Responsibility	Target date	Progress
	and how to refer appropriately to the service for discussion around PLSP needs and reviews.	of support workers and the referral/PLSP process.			