Lews Castle College UHI
Access and Inclusion Strategy
March 2017
Access and Inclusion Strategy

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1. **Introduction**

Lews Castle College UHI serves the communities of the Western Isles and has campuses on four of the islands – the main campus is at Stornoway on Lewis with other centres on North Uist, Benbecula and Barra. As part of the University of the Highlands and Islands, the college leads on several online courses and so has students at HE level from across Scotland, the UK and some courses are delivered internationally.

Covering an island chain 130 miles in length, dominated by remote and rural populations, access and inclusivity can be challenging, but we offer courses from SCQF level 1 up to level 12. Our Strategic Plan 2013 to 2017 details our strategic aims and our Mainstreaming and Equality Outcomes Report 2013 to 2017 details our commitment to creating a positive environment where students can study and achieve their full potential.

2. **Our Inclusive Approach**

Our inclusive service runs throughout the college and is embedded in the way we do things. Our overall aim is that anyone can study here at a level that is appropriate to them and receive the encouragement and learning and teaching experience to enable them to achieve their maximum potential in education before going on to a positive destination where they can continue to contribute effectively to society.

The student journey is monitored in many ways, through achievement, attendance, additionality, positive destinations and personal enhancement. These all correspond with outcomes reflected in the local Community Planning Partnership as we all together try to provide our communities with the skills they need to meet the demands of modern living; helping to provide social cohesion and improve employability, as well as increase educational attainment.

Under the current ELS funding system, we provide both a range of services available to all students, some of which although open to all, may be of more assistance to some of the priority groups outlined in the SFC guidance – deprived backgrounds, care experienced, carers, those with a disability, refugees, single parents, juvenile offenders etc.

**Partnership Working**

We work in partnership with local agencies - local secondary schools on transitions, especially enhanced transitions, our local Skills Development Scotland services, the Western Isles Foyer (working with young people aged 16-25 with issues with homelessness, addiction, mental health issues, truancy from school etc.), Action for Children and Who Cares Scotland.

**Access Courses**

We offer access courses at levels 1, 2 and 3, including ‘Learning and Working’ which is new in 2016-17, Grow to Work – Horticultural Employability (operated in partnership with the local council) and two level 4 courses; Introduction to Further Education and Hair and Beauty level 4. Bespoke support for these Price Group 5 courses is provided by tailoring the course to individual’s needs.
Supporting Individuals

Anyone disclosing a support need who is taking a full-time or substantive part-time course is given the opportunity for a one-to-one interview with a member of Student Services to establish if there is a support need and which additional support measures can be provided. These opportunities are not limited, and may take place at application, after successful interview, or at enrolment/induction.

Applications and enrolments automatically generate an email to Student Services when a support need is disclosed. Potential students also have the ability to request contact from Student Services prior to starting their course. If support is required, and the necessary evidence is available, a Personal Learning and Support Plan will be created.

At HE level PLSPs are produced using the online Accessibility Module on Student Records. Once completed, this flags the Student record and an email is generated to the relevant Personal Academic Tutor, telling them that the support plan is complete. The PAT then can download the Summary of Support and ensure that this information is passed on to the module tutors. As 63% of the 2016-17 HE students with PLSPs are taking online courses, this system allows for flexibility, as support plans can be prepared and agreed without the need for physical face to face meetings.

For the FE students a PLSP is still produced in hard copy in consultation with the student and tutors are made aware of the contents. These are either held by the tutor for on-going input or are held in Student Services and their link person keeps the tutors informed of any changes.

Support that might be provided includes arranging alternative assessment arrangements, extra time with a class tutor, providing coloured overlays or using assistive software. Some students require one to one support with a qualified support tutor – usually for dyslexia but this can also include those with autism or people with mental health issues including anxiety.

UHI is accredited to produce its own Needs Assessments, so as Lews Castle College does not have a qualified assessor for HE level, it uses others from throughout the UHI partnership. A member of the student services team was instrumental in piloting and the subsequent successful rollout of DSA Needs Assessment via Video Conference in 2012. This won an award at the JISC conference that year and the process makes a real difference to many disabled students who now do not have to travel for their Needs Assessment. A training session was held in January 2017 by UHI to highlight best practice around Needs Assessment via VC.

Student Services staff have the vFILS (Facilitating Inclusive Learning Strategies) qualification and can undertake FE needs assessment and also carry out dyslexia screening.

When students require specialist one to one support, there is an appropriately qualified tutor who provides tailored help as needed. Often this is through weekly support meetings. This often complements additional support from Personal Academic Tutors and individual Module Tutors, who spend extra time with students to ensure that they have taken relevant information from teaching sessions or are clear on assignments. This is particularly the case with students on the autistic spectrum, but can be equally important for those whose attendance or concentration is affected by physical and/or mental health conditions.
**ICT**

We ensure that students have parity of access to ICT by having laptops that can be loaned out and ensuring students know about the open access PCs across the college, in the Learning Resource Centre and at the various centres across the islands. This can be key, as students from poorer backgrounds cannot afford PCs or broadband and in many places across the island, connectivity can be patchy or non-existent. Making Wi-Fi available in our buildings provides an opportunity for our students to undertake their studies in the same way as other students on the mainland. Recent student reporting about the poor quality of the WIFI highlighted a hitherto unreported technical issue, which is now successfully resolved.

We do not have a site licence for assistive software for literacy difficulties. However, we do make use of Eduapps, which is freeware produced via JISC. Adapting machines for use with buttons, joysticks and other assistive hardware is provided on a case-by-case basis. We do not have the large numbers of students to make investment in a bank of such items worthwhile, as every case is dealt with on an individual basis, so support is tailored to the needs of that individual on that particular course of study. With the constant updating of apps and fresh development in equipment, we do not wish to carry stock items, which may not be used.

**Health and Welfare**

Student Services at Lews Castle College is a small team of three people, equating to two and a half posts. We handle financial, welfare, disability and student engagement issues for our student body. We take a person-centred approach, and may well deal with a student on a variety of interlinked issues; one student may be in receipt of childcare and discretionary funds, have a disability and require a support plan and be referred for counselling, all within our office. Students are not a tick-box exercise for us, they are complex people with multiple strands of their lives and we may provide input into some of them in their time with us.

Financial advice is not limited to FE and HE government funding (statutory, discretionary, childcare etc.), but includes a broader perspective of student funding queries at FE and HE level. It also includes benefits advice for students, issues around eligibility and signposting where appropriate to third parties for specialist advice and support.

Welfare issues may mean we refer to external third parties or partners such as Western Isles Foyer, CAMH, Western isles Women’s Aid, CAB etc. We have a college counsellor who is external to the college staff, and we have modified the referral process to ensure the confidentiality, which is so crucial in small communities.

We are able to issue vouchers for the local Food Bank and work with a variety of partners locally to improve student knowledge of and accessibility to sources of support.

Care experienced students often disclose due to issues around funding and we are developing positive links with the local Who Cares team. Similarly, we have good relationships with the local Homelessness staff in the council and the local Lone Parent Advisor at the Jobcentre.

The Student Services Team are involved in supporting students with mental health issues, and have all undertaken the Mental Health First Aid course. Staff are also involved in a national and international project around supporting staff to support students with mental health issues, looking at producing a digital toolkit, which will be available across the sector by summer 2017. This work arose directly out of teaching and support staff collaborative working to support students on online courses of study and the specific challenges this presented.

Student Services lead on the local contribution to Healthy Happy You, which is aimed at students across the University of the Highland and Islands – this year activities involved Oral Health Students, a distance challenge and opportunities to take part in walking or running in the Castle Grounds. We also networked an information session on stress, how to spot it and ways to cope with it, led by one of our tutors.

As part of HISA (Highland and Islands Student Association), Lews Castle College has a Depute President and this year is the partner-base for the Vice President for HE. These two students are members on the
Board of Management this year. HISA is a new organisation and is bedding in well. Student participation is problematic as many local people already have their network of friends and activities. However, our local students took part in the Regional Council in Inverness, and local initiatives included evening visits to the local Archery and Ice Skating facilities.

**CPD**

The college operates a well-established staff development programme, which includes events around access and inclusion for both teaching and support staff, recent sessions have included autism awareness training and refugee awareness training.

Senior Managers and Heads of Department had training from Who Cares Scotland regarding Corporate Parenting and we intend to run sessions for teaching staff in the summer to increase awareness amongst all staff of the issues faced and support that can be offered to care experienced students.

As part of staff development activities over the last two years we have had input from College Development Network to deliver in-service Equality training. This led us to consider our college values, and how we deliver these. Further to this, the college has recently developed a set of behaviours to accompany our nine core values. These values are displayed on our internal electronic boards and are shared with students and staff at the beginning of session.

Staff have undertaken a range of compliance training available through the College Development Network on Equality, Freedom of Information and Safeguarding.

**Curriculum**

Inclusive learning and teaching practices are promoted and embedded within our day-to-day teaching and learning. The underlying principles put learners at the centre and as our primary focus, ensuring the learning of each individual is both accessible and inclusive.

Lecturers use the Quality and Equality Learning and Teaching Materials Toolkit (QELTM) to ensure their materials avoid bias and are non-discriminatory.

A variety of teaching strategies, activities, and assignments are used to meet students’ varied learning styles and abilities. Most subjects are delivered in a two-hour slot and are planned to include a variety of activities to keep students engaged. Classes where appropriate promote discussion and encourage sharing of personal experiences. This enriches the learning environment and promotes an understanding of others’ cultural, social and economic experiences.

Classes agree codes of conduct that ensure recognising individuality and respecting others are core to our expectations. Students who engage in online discussion forums have to abide by codes of practice to ensure the learning environment is one of mutual respect and tolerance. The emphasis in all classes and modes of learning is on creating a positive attitude to others.

Core skills support is available to all students through advertised ‘drop-in’ sessions held throughout the year.
3. Financial Commitment

These figures show the high-level spend on access and inclusion. Largely it goes on staff costs, but with some additional expenditure and part of the staff development budget. The fees are costs associated with the partnership running of the ‘Grow to Earn – Horticultural Employability’ course run jointly with the Western Isles Council.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2015-16 Access &amp; Inclusion Spend</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expenditure</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pay Costs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturing Staff</td>
<td>£97,193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Services</td>
<td>£97,381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admissions &amp; Registration</td>
<td>£22,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Development</td>
<td>£2,816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pay Total</strong></td>
<td>£219,918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Pay Costs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsellor</td>
<td>£3,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplies</td>
<td>£600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees</td>
<td>£16,518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Pay Total</strong></td>
<td>£20,443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overheads</td>
<td>£72,573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Spend</strong></td>
<td>£312,934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total SFC FE Grant</strong></td>
<td>£2,292,237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Spend on A&amp;I</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Access and Inclusion % Spend 2015 to 2016
4. Expected Impact of our Access and Inclusion Strategy on Performance Indicators

Recruitment

As the college has not met its activity target for a number of academic sessions, meeting recruitment targets are a priority. The Access and Inclusion Strategy should facilitate increased recruitment across the priority groups.

Withdrawal Rates

The college already achieves withdrawal rates in line with national sector performance indicators. Early withdrawals are students who leave before 25% of the course has elapsed and for whom the College does not receive SFC funding. The early withdrawal rate for students on full-time FE programmes has increased over the last two years to 9% and while this is in line with national sector performance levels, it is a trend the College hopes to reverse.

Further withdrawals are students who stay for more than 25% of the course but leave before the course ends. Often students leave their course early to take up employment or apprenticeship opportunities as they arise. In the three years prior to 2015-16, the further withdrawal rate for students remained at 16%, however in 2015-16 it rose by 1% which is in line with national sector performance levels. Further withdrawal rates for part-time FE learners remains low, currently sitting at 3%, 3 percentage points below national sector performance level.

Successful Completing Rates

The college already achieves success rates above the national sector performance indicators. The percentage of students on full-time FE programmes who completed successfully is 70%, a 3-percentage point reduction from the previous year and 6 percentage points above the national sector performance level. The Scottish Funding Council has targeted colleges to achieve a 69% completed success rate by 2016-17, a target the College has been achieving since 2013-14.

Students who complete with partial success have stayed until the end of the course but have not achieved all of the qualifications they were aiming for. The percentage of students on full-time FE programmes achieving partial success is 4%, well ahead of national sector performance levels.

Enrolment and Successful Completing Rates for Priority Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority Group</th>
<th>No Enrolled</th>
<th>% of total</th>
<th>No. Successful</th>
<th>% Successful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carer</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price Group 5</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care Experienced</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIMD 10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Positive Destination of Full-time Students

The college already achieves a high positive destination rate of 80%

Sector data not available yet
5. Our Ambitions for 2017-19

We are aware that access and inclusion is a continuous on-going process within a college. Producing this strategy has highlighted areas where we can make improvements but this is a continuous and evolving process. However, some of our initial actions and ambitions to work on include:

- Working to improve the evidence base on which we measure the impact of the access and inclusion strategy on priority groups. This will be done by making changes in our induction processes and improving our recording of disclosures made during the year. This involves all staff, teaching and support, as disclosure may be made to any member of staff at any time.

- We will incorporate specific staff development activities to increase awareness of issues and barriers faced by priority groups and to work meaningfully towards reducing these. This will involve locally based partnership working with organisations such as Who Cares Scotland, etc.

- We are actively reviewing the resources allocated to access and inclusion. We can do more with freeware and in-built accessibility features in Windows, and can improve staff awareness of newly developed apps aimed at helping students suffering from stress and anxiety and those with organisation issues.

- We will review our provision of learning support – how this is staffed and how we can improve its reach, within cost-constraints. There are examples of good practice around the UHI partnership, which we could adapt to fit our own circumstances.

- We will continue with the development of inclusive classroom, ensuring learning is presented in a variety of forms to help different learning styles, recognising the value of these.

These changes involve staff development, improving ways of working and successfully communicating our inclusive approach to our potential student body, our stakeholders and our partners.

Our ambition is to ensure that we embody the concept of inclusivity and enable all students to achieve their maximum potential in their time with us, whatever form that takes. This is ultimately how we experience success as an organisation and fulfil our role within our community.

This plan has been produced with input from teaching and support staff, students through our student association and has undergone scrutiny from our Board of Management. Moving forward we intend to ensure that all staff and students of the college feel they have ownership of this strategy and can contribute to its on-going development.
6. **Student Impact - Case Studies**

**Case Study 1**

Student A is a young woman on the autistic spectrum who also struggles with paralysing anxiety. She missed a lot of schooling due a combination of these issues and came to us on the Level 4 Hair and Beauty course. At this time, she had not left the house unaccompanied for several years. She completed this course, with support, encouragement and understanding of her issues. She progressed onto the National Gateway course (Level 5) and this year is taking two Highers. She has alternative assessment arrangements in place and her tutors spend extra time with her if she needs to clarify coursework requirements. She recently travelled to Inverness as part of a small group from the college to attend the Student Association Regional Council. This was her first unaccompanied trip off the island, and she thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

**Case Study 2**

Student B is care experienced and has a diagnosis of ADHD. We have worked in partnership with the local Foyer Project to help her with her finances and lifestyle – specifically getting up for college, as her condition and medication means she struggles with getting ready for classes at 9am. She is a very able student but concentration and producing written work are difficult for her. During the year we have provided a supportive environment and helped her tutors to understand her difficulties and appreciate the enormity of what she is managing to achieve. She receives support from her tutors on a one to one basis to keep her on track and ensure she understands what is required of her. She has recently moved from homeless accommodation into a tenancy supported by Foyer and we have jointly worked to ensure that she can budget and learn the basics of managing her life on her own.

**Case Study 3**

Student C is 20 years old and is on the autistic spectrum. He came initially to study computing at level 5. He then took a catering course for a year, before deciding he felt ready to move on to Higher Education. He is taking his HNC in Computing this year and has applied to carry on to the HND. He struggles with pressure and anxiety, so support has included extra time with his tutor if he is finding a subject difficult, as well as pastoral support from the Student Services team, who provide him with one-to-one time to discuss his worries and anxieties when he feels the need.

**Case Study 4**

Student D is a man of 24 who prior to coming to college had had a variety of jobs. He took the level 5 course in Health and Social Care and during this time, he struggled with his written work. His Personal Academic Tutor referred him to Student Services by his tutor for an assessment and the Adult Dyslexia Screening Test showed he was strongly at risk of dyslexia, principally affecting his spelling and writing skills. He received additional time for exams and has one to one study sessions with a tutor qualified to help students with dyslexia. He is currently taking the level 6 in the same subject and hopes to progress onto an HNC in Childhood Practice, with a view to completing a degree. Therefore, we are in the process of assisting him to get a diagnosis of dyslexia from an Educational Psychologist, so that he can apply for Disabled Student Award from SAAS for assistive software as he moves forwards.
Welcome to Our Campus

“... a great college in a magical place ...”

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