



IMPACT OF UHI NWH PROPOSALS TO MOVE TO LARGELY ONLINE DELIVERY

Report by Chief Officer for Education and Children's Services

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide information to the Comhairle in respect of the Notice of Motion made at its meeting of 1 May 2024 regarding exploration of the impact of proposals from UHI North, West and Hebrides to move to a largely online model of tuition.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 At the Comhairle meeting of 1 May 2024, a Notice of Motion was proposed and accepted stating *'That the Comhairle agree that a Report be submitted to the next series of meetings detailing the impacts to our economy and tertiary education provision following the proposals being considered by UHI North, West and Hebrides to move to a largely online model of tuition.'*
- 2.2 Following the acceptance of the motion at the Comhairle meeting, UHI North, West and Hebrides (UHI NWH) issued a press statement on 5 May 2024 responding to 'Inaccurate reports of moving to a largely online mode of tuition'. The statement went on to clarify the UHI NWH position on the matter.
- 2.3 Officers of Education and Children's Services have subsequently conducted an initial survey of secondary school headteachers and with e-Sgoil to establish what issues or changes they have noted in terms of any move to online course delivery or tuition in partnership with UHI.
- 2.4 A preliminary analysis of responses indicate that there has been a small increase in the number of courses and programmes that UHI NWH proposes to deliver online where provision was previously face-to-face. More detailed analysis is required to establish the scale of this in full and to consider the potential impact on in-school and post-school pathways to qualifications and employment.
- 2.5 Should members wish it, a report can be presented to a future series providing more detailed analysis in respect of the original motion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle note the report**

Contact Officer: Donald Macleod, Chief Officer for ECS

Appendix:

Background Papers: [UHI North, West and Hebrides Press Release 02/05/2024](#)

IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	None
Legal	None
Staffing	It is possible that moving to online delivery for courses and programmes for school-age learner could result in a requirement for additional Comhairle staff to supervise online learning in-situ that was previously delivered face-to-face.
Assets and Property	None
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	The recommendation does not impact on any currently identified strategic risks.
Equalities	No information has been shared about equality impact assessments of proposals.
Corporate Strategy	Strengthen the Local Economy: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Support skills development across communities and workforce. Support Children, Families and Young People: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ensure schools and lifelong learning are at the heart of our communities, with particular emphasis on Gàidhlig, digital skills and new technologies.
Environmental Impact	None
Consultation	None on the part of the Comhairle

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 At the Comhairle meeting of 1 May 2024 a Notice of Motion was proposed stating *‘That the Comhairle agree that a Report be submitted to the next series of meetings detailing the impacts to our economy and tertiary education provision following the proposals being considered by UHI North, West and Hebrides to move to a largely online model of tuition.’*. The Comhairle accepted the motion and a request was made to provide a report to the next committee series.
- 5.2 Following on from the meeting where the Notice of Motion was raised, UNI North, West and Hebrides (UHI NWH) issued a press statement on 5 May 2024 responding to ‘Inaccurate reports of moving to a largely online mode of tuition’.

DETAIL

- 6.1 The press release issued by UHI NWH states that they are not moving to a ‘largely online model of delivery’ and that over 80% of further education qualifications and courses will continue to be taught face-to-face in the coming year. It acknowledged the curriculum review that has been undertaken to

establish a single integrated offer across all their locations and that the delivery of practical courses at campuses have been safeguarded.

- 6.2 The statement goes on to say that 20% of courses are delivered online in timetabled classes that this model widens access across rural and island communities. [The full press release is available here.](#)
- 6.3 Following acceptance of the motion, an initial survey was conducted of e-Sgoil and the Comhairle's four secondary schools to establish whether or not they had observed changes in the proposed method of delivery for courses delivered to school pupils or in the information leavers are receiving about Further Education courses that will be available to them.
- 6.4 Sir E Scott School, Sgoil Lionacleit and Castlebay School all report courses that were previously being delivered face-to-face now being proposed to be delivered online to schools for 2024-25. Examples of this include Maritime Studies and Psychology. The Nicolson Institute reported no changes to the delivery method of UHI NWH courses their pupils receive.
- 6.5 Schools were also asked if upcoming school leavers had information or experience of Further Education courses they were planning to undertake with UHI NWH from 2024 onwards had been moved from face-to-face to online delivery but all reported no instances of this being raised to-date.
- 6.6 When schools were asked if they had concerns about any potential increases in the delivery of UHI courses online, feedback indicated that the most critical element to consider was the degree of practical learning and skills development that the course entailed and that such course elements would need to continue to be delivered in-person if high quality acquisition of skills and qualifications were to be maintained.
- 6.7 Schools did not express significant concern about online delivery of courses where it was a suitable medium for the specific course and quality access to online delivery was maintained. Through e-Sgoil and cross-school collaborations, Comhairle schools have been supportive of the development of online courses within their own curricula, where appropriate, in the interests of creating greater equity of access, especially in rural communities. This has also been important in increasing access to courses linked to local economic priorities.

CONCLUSION

- 7.1 From a school perspective, there is some evidence that a small number of courses are moving from face-to-face to online delivery but this doesn't represent evidence of an overall change in approach at the present time. Comhairle schools have, themselves, been exploring and developing access to online course delivery to expand their curriculum offer and increase equity, especially in their work with e-Sgoil.