

Feedback Report Summary

Annual Appraisal of the UHI North, West and Hebrides (NWH) Chair's Performance for the period June 2025 to June 2026

1. Purpose of Summary Report.

The main purpose of this summary report, presented by the UHI NWH Senior Independent Non-Executive Board Member (SIM), Shona MacDougall, is to provide the Board with an overview of the process adopted and findings based on KPI questions used to measure the performance of the UHI NWH Chair, Derek Lewis during his third annual appraisal.

2. Background.

The Code of Good Governance, for Scotland's Colleges (2025), as adopted by UHI NWH, sets out the requirement for all College Boards to have a SIM. The College Development Network (CDN) has a standard role description for a SIM, with one of their key duties being to appraise the Board Chair's performance on an annual basis. The third annual appraisal of Derek Lewis, as Chair of UHI NWH, was undertaken during the months of May and June 2026, with the final report being prepared for presentation to the UHI NWH Board of Management on 17 June 2026.

3. Appraisal Process.

The appraisal process adopted reflected the principles as set out in the Guidance Notes for Boards in the College Sector – a Development Framework, including Evaluation of Chair (utilising Annex E – Chair Core Skills Matrix).

Cognisance was taken of the context surrounding this appraisal, namely year three of post-merger, with a Board which is much more established but still facing significant challenges, both within the external and internal operating environment. Financial sustainability remains the most significant challenge, sitting alongside the dependencies of the wider UHI transformation for change agenda.

In addition, cognisance was also taken of the overall positive findings of the independent Merger Evaluation Report, undertaken following Year two of merger and presented to the Board in year three and thereafter disseminated internally and externally.

The SIM, in agreement with the Vice Chairs/ Committee Chairs, decided on wider Board involvement for this third annual appraisal of the Chair, namely through an online survey and thereafter a relatively discussive approach. The core principles of the Board Development Framework - Evaluation of a Chair, Annex E Chair Core Skills Matrix (see attached) was used as the basis for this online survey. The scoring matrix adopted was a range of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). The online survey was initially issued to 15 Board Members. However, two Board Members were relatively new appointees and had only attended one Board meeting/event and their input was deferred in this instance.

In total, 11 out of the remaining 13 Board Members completed the online survey, a return rate of 84.6%. The SIM thereafter extracted the key and consensus feedback messages but did not include any service specific comments (albeit shared separately with the Chair). The overall feedback from the online survey returns from the Board Members had been extremely positive. Some points and suggestions were noted for Board support to the Chair for taking forward – as noted below at paragraph 4.

In addition to the information from the online Board survey – the two Vice Chairs, along with the other Committee Chair and the Principal (in her capacity as a Board Member as well as Chief Executive) met individually with the SIM to discuss and evaluate the Chair's performance.

The findings from these individual meetings, along with an overview of the findings from the online Board survey thereafter being shared with the Chair at his annual appraisal meeting, held with the SIM on Monday 8th June 2026. The Chair of the HR Committee, Christopher Alliston, was also in attendance at this meeting.

4. Appraisal Findings and Conclusion.

The SIM provided feedback from the discussions as held with the Vice Chairs, the other Committee Chair, Principal and from the Board online survey– in summary, this was hugely supportive and positive feedback in respect of the Chair's leadership, wealth of experience, accessibility & support to Board members. The Vice Chairs, the other Committee Chair and wider Board also fully acknowledged the very challenging leadership environment as continuing into year three of post-merger that faced the Chair. The significant financial challenges and wider UHI transformation dependencies both impacting on capacity and performance of NWH and requiring strong leadership, resilience and innovation. Without exception, the Chair has continued in year three to demonstrate strong leadership capacity and high professional standards, with personal integrity in all instances.

As we enter year four of NWH, the Chair fully recognises the exceptionally challenging environment that both UHI and NWH face. Transformation and financial sustainability remaining at the forefront. As specific to NWH strong leadership by the Chair and the Board / Committees will be required in many areas, continuing to progress in all our enabling strategies and delivering the ever-challenging financial sustainability plan and at the same time looking forward to pursuing new opportunities. The Vice Chairs /Committee Chairs and the wider Board members have highlighted the following areas for development and supporting the Chair in taking forward: -

- Continuing the work as commenced on improving governance in the quality of Board and Committee reporting (including the balance of strategic focus and operational detail in Reports) and who attends meetings– to allow more critical and strategic discussion at meetings by Board members and reducing time spent by Officers in introducing Reports and explaining operational detail. However, Reports of the required quality will require to be submitted timeously to allow this to happen. This will also improve the level of scrutiny through improved discussion and enhanced strategic focus.

- Level of detail in Minutes and recording of decisions – review current process.
- Board recruitment and succession planning – to ensure a high performing Board is always in place, with a skills mix of active contributors.
- Reviewing induction training to include mentoring. Potentially, through our governance professional, pursuing external benchmarking and mentoring by other College Boards as part of the NWH induction programme.
- Feedback on Board development issues – one to one and collective.
- Board networking with other Boards in the College Sector.
- Customer and stakeholder networking by the Board as a whole.

In conclusion, the Chair of NWH has, during the pre-merger transition period and the first three years of post-merger, demonstrated an exceptional and outstanding leadership performance. Derek continues to bring a wealth of experience to his Chair's role and to NWH. His networking reach continues to be significant, and he remains a highly respected member of UHI Court. His work ethic and personal commitment has not waived. NWH is very fortunate to continue to have Derek Lewis as the Chair as it progresses into the chapter of a more embedded but still challenging year four.

