

Local Advisory Committee (West Highlands) – Summary Update

Reporting period: March 2025 – February 2026

Committee: LAC West

Chair: Roddy Bailey (SDS)

1. Purpose

This paper provides the College Board with a concise overview of key activity, discussion and strategic messages arising from the West Highlands Local Advisory Committee (LAC) between March 2025 and February 2026, this includes meetings held on 15 May 2025 and 9 October 2025. The report focuses on regional opportunity, employer engagement, curriculum alignment and key risks.

2. Strategic and Regional Context

The LAC West highlighted the scale of economic transformation expected across the West Highlands, particularly linked to renewable energy, offshore activity and associated infrastructure. Partners emphasised that investment levels over the next decade will place significant demand on local skills pipelines and workforce capacity.

The College confirmed that these opportunities are a central driver of its strategic direction, with curriculum planning and partnership activity aligned to anticipated growth sectors. However, members noted that current funding levels are not sufficient to respond fully to the scale or pace of opportunity without new approaches.

There was strong consensus that success will require:

- Employer-led and demand-driven provision
- Co-investment with industry
- Coordinated engagement with public sector partners and government

3. Curriculum and Workforce Development

Workforce North

The Committee received updates on Workforce North, an initiative bringing together employers, colleges and partners to align provision with regional demand. Key areas of development include:

- Engineering degrees and graduate apprenticeships
- Civil engineering and infrastructure-related provision
- Upskilling of the existing workforce

Members noted the importance of addressing wider system issues, including housing and planning, alongside skills development.

Offshore and ROV Training

The October 2025 meeting reviewed the outcomes of a pilot ROV training course delivered in partnership with industry. The pilot was successful, with all candidates completing the course. Learning from this has informed future delivery, with further courses planned and exploration of industry accreditation underway.

This activity was recognised as a strong example of responsive, employer-driven curriculum development with potential to become part of core College provision.

4. Employer Engagement and Community Activity

The LAC received regular updates on engagement activity across the West Highlands, including:

- Delivery of short courses to local businesses
- Expansion of employability provision in Lochaber
- STEM outreach across rural and remote locations
- Ongoing collaboration with chambers of commerce and local partners

“Engagement Tuesdays” were highlighted as an effective approach to strengthening relationships with employers, schools and community groups.

The October meeting also considered committee membership and recruitment, including the use of social media and partner networks to broaden engagement and ensure strong employer representation. We have a new member of the committee who is a current student of the college and they are a very welcome addition as they bring a different focus and perspective.

Some members have been interviewed for the upcoming social media LAC recruitment campaign.

5. Financial Context and Constraints

The Committee was briefed on the challenging financial position facing the College, reflecting:

- Rising cost pressures (pensions, National Insurance and pay)
- Flat or reducing core funding
- Lack of capital funding for infrastructure investment

Despite this, members identified opportunities to grow **commercial income**, including offshore-related training delivered from Fort William. The importance of flexibility and partnership working was emphasised.

6. Strategic Initiatives and Policy Alignment

Employer Guide for Green Skills

The Committee welcomed the Employer Guide for Green Skills, which clearly sets out the College’s offer and encourages employers to shape provision. The guide has been promoted at regional and national events and is supporting engagement with the renewables sector.

West Highlands Manifesto and Community Wealth Building

Members discussed the West Highlands Manifesto, recognising its strong alignment with business need, skills demand and community wealth-building principles. The Committee acknowledged the constraints of public funding and the increasing importance of partnership with the private sector.

7. Quality, Reputation and Student Experience

The October 2025 meeting noted:

- Increased demand for Further and Higher Education provision
- Strong national recognition through multiple award nominations
- Ongoing work to improve student satisfaction survey response rates and visibility of positive outcomes

These discussions provided assurance on learner experience and institutional reputation.

8. Key Messages for the Board

Across the reporting period, the LAC West consistently highlighted:

- Significant regional opportunity, particularly in renewables and offshore activity
- Strong employer willingness to engage and co-invest
- Funding and capacity constraints as a key risk
- Clear alignment between College strategy and regional priorities
- The need for collective advocacy to government and agencies

9. Conclusion

The LAC West continues to play a critical role in informing the College's strategic direction in the West Highlands. Its discussions demonstrate strong alignment with regional economic priorities while clearly articulating both the scale of opportunity and the constraints that must be managed. The Committee provides valuable assurance that College activity remains responsive to employer and community need.