

UHI NORTH, WEST & HEBRIDES LJC & STAFF CONSULTATION – GENERAL FEEDBACK REVIEW

1 Introduction

Following the successful merger of UHI North Highland, UHI Outer Hebrides and UHI West Highland on 1st Aug 2023 to create UHI North, West & Hebrides (UHINWH), the College's Organisation Design (OD) Project Board – comprising the interim Executive Leadership Team (ELT), the Head of Marketing & Comms and the UHI Programme Director for post-merger integration – has overseen an extensive OD process to design an affordable and strategically-aligned organisational staffing structure. This process included conducting extensive consultation on the proposed structure and the overall process with staff and trade unions.

2 Report Purpose & Scope

A separate report¹ provided a summary of consultation feedback received specifically about the proposed organisation structure. Version 1.0 of that report was issued to the UHINWH Board's HR Committee and to the Local Joint Committee (LJC) on 07/06/24 and has undergone subsequent, minor updates to version 1.2. The report provided analysis of all observations from the feedback and gave corresponding recommendations about the proposed structure.

Many of the feedback inputs received via the methods detailed below related more generally to the consultation and organisation timescales, information and processes *and not to the proposed structure itself*. Therefore, **the purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the general, non-structure-related feedback comments**. The main findings will be considered further when compiling the progress report on Year 1 of the new College.

3 Consultation feedback methods

Consultation feedback was sought from staff and from the recognised trade unions (EIS-FELA and Unison), through the sources detailed in this section.

3.1 Collective consultation

This was conducted via the LJC. The union branch representatives surveyed their UHINWH staff members and provided copies of the survey results to ELT in late May 2024:

- 55 lecturing staff members completed the EIS-FELA survey.
- 33 professional services staff members completed the Unison survey.

Note: The unions submitted a joint Local Dispute on 25 Jun 2024 which includes a list of specific Dispute issues, the majority of which had previously been raised at LJC meetings and covering some themes which were also commented on in their members surveys. At the time of writing the College management is attempting to hold a series of meetings with the trade union representatives to resolve the Dispute.

¹ 20240717_UHINWH-Proposed-structure-consultation-feedback-report_v1-2

3.2 Individual staff consultation.

Undertaken in accordance with UHINWH organisational change HR procedures, senior management worked through consultations by organisation tier in the proposed structure from director downwards. This took place over March-June. Consultations with staff focused on the plans for the individual, their feedback on that proposal, and their feedback on the proposed structure. Staff consultations were being concluded with the last of 584 staff members in total – the majority individually, often more than once, and in some cases consultation was via a group meeting where there were staff cohorts who directly matched to posts in the proposed structure. Over 75% of staff were direct matches to roles in the proposed structure. There is a very small group of staff for whom consultation has not yet been completed due to being suspended whilst the Local Dispute is extant, and their individual consultations will be complete immediately thereafter.

3.3 Ad hoc staff feedback.

Staff could provide individual or group feedback through any of these options:

- To the 'NWH Restructure' inbox;
- Anonymously via a Microsoft Forms link;
- Through Staff Ambassadors;
- At staff drop-in sessions, which were held in-person and online.

4 Summary of feedback

The summary of general feedback is provided in the tables at Appendix 1 as follows:

- Definitions of the terms used in analysis of the feedback are in Table 1.
- Types, quantities and sources of general feedback/queries are listed in tables 2-5.
- The Organisation Design timeline of updates is listed in Table 6.

In total 313 feedback items/queries were submitted through 281 individual inputs from staff through the mechanisms described above, and which are in addition to the feedback from the 88 union members' survey responses. It has not been possible to identify if individuals raised the same feedback issue through both the unions surveys and staff feedback mechanisms, so all inputs have been considered equally.

4.1 Analysis Main Findings

4.1.1 Queries raised versus OD updates timeline

This review evaluated when certain feedback was received against the context of what information had been provided to staff by that point, as detailed in Table 6. Key milestones to note are summarised overleaf:

08/02/24	First draft of the proposed department/team-level structure shared with all staff, and updates provided subsequently as the proposed structure was refined.
11/03/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collective consultation with trade unions commenced. The trade unions wanted this to be completed first before individual consultations commenced. However, the College management confirmed it was legally permissible to run the processes concurrently to reduce the timescale. Individual consultations commenced with staff at organisational tiers 3 and 4 (provisional director and head level).
13-21/03/24	Team briefings take place to explain to all staff how the individual consultations will be conducted
25/03/24	Individual consultations commenced with staff at organisational tier 5 (operational managers and specialists)
05/24	EIS-FELA and Unison conduct staff survey with branch members
22/05/24	Individual consultations commenced with staff at organisational tier 6 (unpromoted staff)
25/06/24	Local Dispute letter submitted by trade union branch representatives.

In the context of those milestones:

- When comparing the feedback topics with the updates timeline it should be noted that 181 of the 281 staff inputs were raised *before* approx. 6 weeks of individual consultations commenced with un-promoted College staff (in the 3rd week of May), who accounted for well over 80% of all College staff. Therefore most of the queries raised would have been resolved during the individual consultation process.
- The union surveys were completed by and published in late May, so the majority of those who completed these surveys would have done so before their own individual consultations had commenced.
- Table 6 illustrates the regular updates that were provided to staff throughout the main phase of OD work, which included regular updates via an extremely comprehensive set of FAQs. These FAQs were accessible to all staff and would have answered many queries raised through the feedback process.
- In parallel with the information provided to all staff, an extensive range of documents and consultation information has been provided to the LJC from March to date and logged in a documents tracker in the LJC's SharePoint folder.

4.1.2 Process Queries

Table 5 shows the feedback topics raised by staff using the mechanisms outside of the union surveys. Coloured rows indicate the main topics where concerns were raised, and the remainder were overwhelmingly process queries about the OD-related HR processes and implications. The most prevalent themes of concerns fed back are listed in sections 4.1.3 to 4.1.7 below.

4.1.3 Understanding where roles or functions fitted in the proposed structure

Issue: This was a common query from the feedback provided: 40 EIS-FELA members, 22 Unison members and 18 other staff members asked this. For the union member queries, these were all raised before individuals consultation commenced with all unpromoted staff, who constitute most of the College workforce. Most of the other 18 queries were raised at the March team briefings or the May staff drop-in sessions – therefore, these had been raised by staff yet to undergo individual consultation.

Analysis: Ultimately, this feedback theme was addressed by the individual consultation process and by the wider, supplementary OD information published regularly to all staff. From the staff's perspective finding out the answer to this question can have involved a wait of up to 2 months because of the time taken to carry out all individual consultation processes. Not having undertaken a large individual consultation process of this kind before, the College underestimated the time needed to conduct it thoroughly and properly.

4.1.4 Support with Mental Health & Wellbeing

Issue: 44 EIS-FELA members and 22 Unison members stated that the Organisation Design programme had impacted their mental health/wellbeing. 9 staff members raised concerns about their workload because of the combined demands of routine business delivery as well as OD changes; and 8 staff members had concerns about the extent to which they felt supported through the process.

Analysis: The College management attempted to address the problem in multiple ways:

- Staff morale/stress/wellbeing was logged on the OD Project Risk Register from the outset and this ensured it was managed and monitored by the interim ELT and reported quarterly to the Board of Management itself and to the Board's Audit & Risk Management committee.
- ELT aimed to complete the OD and restructure implementation as quickly as practicable in order to remove this source of uncertainty. At the time of writing this has been delayed by the Local Dispute process.
- The availability of existing staff wellbeing online resources and existing HR processes for individual stress management for all staff was re-publicised to everyone.
- The interim ELT adopted the HSE Management Standards and HSE Working Mind campaign as a framework and method to prevent work-related stress and to support good mental health in the workplace.
- A corresponding Work-Related Stress Risk Assessment was compiled in Riskex, the College's safety management software platform, and a resulting 12 -point action plan is being monitored and progressed.
- The proposed organisation structure has been implemented on an interim basis, pending resolution of the Local Dispute, to provide all staff with more stability regarding their roles and teams.

4.1.5 Consideration of Staff views

Issue: Several staff raised concerns about the extent to which their views, insights and ideas had been considered during the OD process.

Analysis:

- During November and December 2023 the OD project team had conducted over 20 Function Analysis workshops with a cross-section of staff from each function group (Curriculum, Student Records, IT, Estates & Campus Services, and so on), with one workshop per function (and 2 for the Curriculum function, to ensure representative input across NWH's geography and subject areas). The staff involved completed a questionnaire beforehand which covered the main purpose and responsibilities of the function, whether there were required activities not currently undertaken that need to start, or any that could be stopped, which departments the function collaborated with most, statutory requirements, opportunities, skills development needs and risks. Each workshop discussed and clarified the questionnaire, and the final outputs were provided to the workstream/operational delivery group lead and to the responsible interim ELT member. The interim ELT members were then required to consider the Function Analysis findings when designing the new department/team/staffing structures in their areas of responsibility in the proposed College organisation structure.
- All-Staff forums were held on Teams regularly throughout the programme and included opportunities for Q&A. These sessions tended not to elicit many questions or feedback from staff either due to limited time, the prospect of speaking out in front of so many colleagues, or simply the need to digest all the new information presented at each forum. However, all of these forum briefings did emphasise to all staff (and repeated to them in email and homehub updates) the variety of methods they could use to ask questions and provide feedback – as described in [sect 3.3](#).
- Noting that many general feedback items were submitted prior to individual consultation commencing for the most staff, it should be noted that individual consultations were a key opportunity for staff to make their views known. However, given the time taken to undertake individual consultations, especially across all of the un-promoted staff grades, there was a relatively limited amount of feedback about the OD process and proposed structure generated from individual consultations. Presumably this is because individual staff members' priority at their individual consultations would have been on how they might be affected personally by any changes.

4.1.6 Future of the Organisation

Issue: There were concerns raised about the future of the College and its role and methods, including at specific department level; and similar concerns about what the restructure's implications would be for the College's future performance.

Analysis: The interim ELT and OD project staff worked through an OD process facilitated initially by UHI OD-specialist HR staff as a means to develop design principles, an operating

model concept and eventual draft organisation structure. Had time allowed, 'in an ideal world', more opportunities would have been provided to engage a wider range of staff in the OD process. However, the constraints of the year's funding dictated a pace of OD and consultation that was under severe pressure to meet timescales imposed by the need to deliver major financial reductions. This was clearly communicated to all staff who understood the financial challenges but led to limited opportunities for considered discussion on how best to implement a new structure that would meet the college's strategic ambitions in full. At an early stage it was recognised that the aim of the current phase of OD would be to deliver an affordable structure that was aligned to the strategic priorities. Moreover, this would be a starting point from which the College can begin to refine its operating model across all staff, sites and new departments; and which will enable it to become more effective and efficient as it targets new growth in line with its strategy. Therefore, subsequent *Organisation Development* plans will be needed to enable growth of the organisation's maturity and effectiveness, and this performance will be reported back to the Board's HR committee, reflected upon, and will inform future changes to the College's structure and business model.

4.1.7 Trade Unions

Issue: Several feedback items queried how trade unions would be involved in the OD process, how that would affect the programme and what that meant for staff who were non-union members. All of these queries were raised prior to individual consultation commencing.

Analysis: The College was committed to undertaking meaningful consultation with both recognised trade unions (EIS-FELA and Unison) in accordance with the Local Recognition and Procedural Agreement with each union. Having confirmed the legality of doing so, the College management undertook collective consultation via the LJC, and individual consultations, in parallel with each other. By following this process it meant that more detailed proposals were generally shared with the unions first, but in all cases they were shared with all staff shortly afterwards. All staff were given equal opportunity to provide their own feedback through the mechanisms described in [sect 3](#), and union members could also provide inputs via their union's survey or their union representative if they wished. Ultimately completion of the implementation of an approved organisation structure has been delayed by the ongoing Local Dispute, hence its interim implementation pending resolution of the dispute. The College's management are committed to seeking resolution of the Dispute in partnership with the unions as soon as possible, which is still in progress at the time of writing.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Timescales

Timing/timescales is a theme that runs through much of the general feedback. Many queries about the process of OD, VSS and consultation were understandably generated at an early stage of the process before communications and consultations could catch up. The biggest challenge was the time needed to carry out the schedule of individual consultations across many staff, and the impact of this on individual staff has been clear throughout the programme. Unfortunately the College could not call upon any additional staff or tools to

speed up this process, hence individual consultations simply had to take the time needed to ensure they were done correctly, consistently and fairly. Due to the running order of consultations with staff cohorts – from senior managers, to managers, to unpromoted staff and, lastly, the executive leadership – individual consultations with unpromoted staff were towards the end of the process. With very few exceptions, the College management and staff had not been through this kind of process before so the duration required was underestimated, leading to extremely concerned staff whilst they awaited their consultations.

5.2 Communications

The Head of Marketing & Comms and the interim ELT members led a major effort to provide up-to-date and accurate information on the OD process and plans to all staff, updating them whenever there were significant concrete changes to publicise. There was also extensive information provided about the HR processes that would underpin OD implementation, most notably through an extremely comprehensive range of FAQs. Informal feedback from staff suggested that many staff did not engage with the information provided because either they were overwhelmed by it or they simply wanted to find out the specific details of their own circumstances and whether they would be subject to any changes. However, up to date information was published regularly for line managers and staff to use as soon as practically possible throughout the programme: and this was the fair, transparent and proper thing to do.

5.3 Lessons Learned

Many of the general feedback issues raised were queries or concerns about the various OD processes undertaken. Many items relate to how these processes were communicated to staff, how they were involved in them, over what timescales and the overall impact on staff. Similar themes are emerging from parallel work to identify lessons learned during the post-merger integration phase. These lessons learned, positive and negative, are being collated across various staff and stakeholders and will be compiled as a complete list, with the most significant items also being included in the end of year 1 report which will be compiled for SFC and UHI. Where relevant, the issues raised in this report will be considered for inclusion with the compilation of lessons learned.

Appendix:

1. General Feedback response data summaries.

Appendix 1 – General Feedback response data summaries

Table 1 - terms used in the analysis

Category	Topic / Definition
Career Development	Career Development Opportunities
Communication	Style And Language
Consultation	Anything related to Individual Consultations
Contracts	Anything related to Staff Contracts
EIA	Equality Impact Assessments
Estates	Questions Around Buildings And Centres
Finance	Financial Numbers And Future
Future	How The Future Will Look For The College
HR	HR-related, not Contracts and Salary
Identity	Loss Of Identity
Job Description	Job Description And Role Responsibilities
Job Evaluation	Job Evaluation
Lack Of Support	Stress, Mental Health, Support From Management
Marketing	Marketing Of Courses
Matching In	Matching In
Naming	Change Of The Naming
National Bargaining	National Bargaining
Pension	Pension
Performance	Performance Of The Structure
Provision Of Information	Lack Of Information, Transparency, Uncertainty
Redeployment	Redeployment
Redundancy	Redundancy
Salary	Salary, Pay, Wages
Scoring	Scoring mechanism for HR matching/transfer processes
Staff View	Concerns About Staff Views Being Considered
Strategy	Strategy
Structure	Queries About The Proposed Structure
Team Briefings	Team Briefings
Timeline	Timeline And Timescales
Training	Training For New Roles
UHI Integration	Future Integration With UHI
Union	Trade Union-Related
VSS	Voluntary Severance Scheme
Work Load	Concerns Over Workload In Proposed Structure

Feedback from Trade Union members' surveys (Late May 2024)

Table 2 – EIS-FELA members' responses

EIS-FELA	
Topic	Number of responses (out of total of 55)
Don't know where they fit in the proposed structure	40
Impact on Mental Health - Yes	44
Implementation timescale realistic - No	44
Provision Of Information	22
Staff View	19
Lack Of Support	7
Failure of Merger	2
Communication	1
Timeline	1

Table 3 – UNISON members' responses

UNISON	
Topic	Number of responses (out of total of 33)
Don't know where they fit in the proposed structure	22
Impact on Mental Health - Yes	22
Implementation timescale realistic - No	26
Provision Of Information	17
Staff View	8
Communication	4
Performance	3
Frustration at the situation	2
Timeline	1

General Staff Feedback

Table 4 - Sources and quantity of feedback items

Staff Briefings (13-21 March)	158
Staff drop-ins (13-17 May)	47
Individual Consultation (11 Mar to date)	41
Restructure inbox (21 Mar – 30 Apr)	22
Anonymous Feedback form (08 May – 21 Jun)	12
OD SharePoint page comment (26 Mar)	1
	281

Table 5 - Type and quantity of feedback queries

Coloured rows indicate the main topics where concerns were raised. The remainder were overwhelmingly process queries.

Structure – general queries	54
Timeline	34
Consultation	20
Structure - where a role is in the proposed structure	18
Matching In	16
Salary	15
HR	14
Contracts	13
Provision Of Information	13
Communication	12
Job Description	12
Performance	12
Union	11
Future	9
Redeployment	9
Work Load	9

Lack Of Support	8
Finance	5
VSS	5
Distribution of managers at sites	3
UHI Integration	3
Identity	2
Redundancy	2
Staff View	2
Training	2
Career Development	1
EIA	1
Job Evaluation	1
Marketing	1
Naming	1
National Bargaining	1
Pension	1
Scoring	1
Strategy	1
Team Briefings	1
	313*

* Note that this is higher than the number of feedback inputs received (281, see previous page) but is due to some feedback responses covering more than one topic.

Table 6 - Summary of All-Staff Organisation Updates as at 03 Sep 2024

Dec-23	Data gathering workshops.
Dec-23	Organisational design drop-in sessions.
12/12/2023	Conclusion of stage one of voluntary severance.
14/12/2023	Organisation Design video update and FAQs added (sharepoint.com)
21/12/2023	Latest update to project timeline.
Jan-24	Analysis of baseline information, voluntary severance outcomes, and curriculum review to inform new structure.
22/01/2024	Latest update to project timeline.
Feb-24	HR implementation processes finalised.
08/02/24	Publication of the proposed department and team level structure. We encourage feedback through our staff forum, question and answer sessions, as advertised, or via communications.nwh@uhi.ac.uk
28/02/2024	End February 2024: Structure design finalised, including posts and levels. The proposed department and team level structure is refined to take account of feedback.
06/03/2024	Endorsement of organisation design proposals by the Board of Management for formal consultation, on the basis that the proposed structure can deliver on the strategic objectives set out in the merger business case and financial sustainability.
11/03/2024	W/C 11 March 2024: Individual consultation begins with affected staff for Tier 3 (director level) and Tier 4 (head level) posts this week. Organisational tiers are explained in more detail here.
11/03/2024	Collective consultation on the organisation design proposals and the associated savings starts with recognised trade unions via the Local Joint Committee.
14/03/2024	Organisation design - consultation start
15/03/2024	Team level briefings scheduled Team briefings - organisation design (sharepoint.com)
18/03/2024	W/C 18 March 2024: Team level briefings Team briefing slides, OD SP site.pptx
25/03/2024	W/C 25 March 2024: Individual consultation begins with affected staff for Tier 5 (manager and team leaders) and Tier 6 (all other staff) posts this week. Organisational tiers are explained in more detail here.
27/03/2024	Frequently Asked Questions sent to all staff. Organisation Design updated FAQs (sharepoint.com)
25/04/2024	Organisation design consultation: Updated timescales and FAQs (sharepoint.com)
30/04/2024	Organisation design update (sharepoint.com)

09/05/2024	Organisation design feedback and questions (sharepoint.com)
16/05/2024	Savings update (sharepoint.com)
16/05/2024	Provisional curriculum managers (sharepoint.com)
22/05/2024	Consultation update – tier six (sharepoint.com)
22/05/2024	Update: Provisional curriculum managers (sharepoint.com)
23/05/2024	Lecturer job profile based on professional standards , sent to lecturers.
17/06/2024	Staff forum
20/06/2024	Organisation design – progress update (sharepoint.com)
16/07/2024	Organisation Restructure Update: Consultation Progress, Trade Union Local Dispute, and Next Steps (sharepoint.com)
16/07/2024	Proposed Structure Consultation Feedback Report and Recommendations
13/08/2024	Welcome back and interim structure arrangements for 2024/2025 (sharepoint.com)
14/08/2024	Interim operating structure 2024-2025 (sharepoint.com)