

Committee	Human Resources Committee		
Date paper prepared	05/11/2025	Date of committee meeting	12/11/2025
Subject	College HR Committee – Update Report		
Author	Vicky Ferguson, Director of People and Culture		
Action requested	I. For discussion		
Purpose of the paper	This paper provides an update on HR-related matters since the last committee meeting, including HR KPI's, staffing changes, policy updates, ongoing initiatives, and upcoming priorities.		
Summary of the paper	<p>HR KPI's</p> <p>Investors in People Review and Findings</p> <p>Rapid Response Group – Next Steps</p> <p>Organisation Structure Review</p> <p>Staff Changes – Update</p> <p>National Bargaining</p> <p>UHI North, West and Hebrides Job Evaluation</p> <p>Update on Unresolved Dispute Items</p> <p>Year 2 Merger Evaluation Report Update</p> <p>Policy and Compliance</p>		
Consultation	Executive Leadership Team and Human Resources Team members		
Resource implications	None identified		
Risk implications	Adherence to the guidelines will help reduce the likelihood of governance failures occurring and will also increase transparency and accountability around key decisions and challenges.		

Link with strategy	This report has a direct link with the People and Culture strategy
Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion	Ensuring our documents can be read and understood by everyone, including people with disabilities or impairments, is a legal requirement under the Equality Act 2010.
Island Community Impact	Not required
Paper status	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Open – The paper may be circulated to non-members of the committee and published online without restriction. <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted – The paper must not be circulated to non-members or published online until after the committee meeting. <input type="checkbox"/> Confidential – The paper must not be circulated beyond the committee members and should not be published online. Some information is considered commercially sensitive. [Please note papers may still be subject to Freedom of Information requests – see below].
Freedom of information	Open

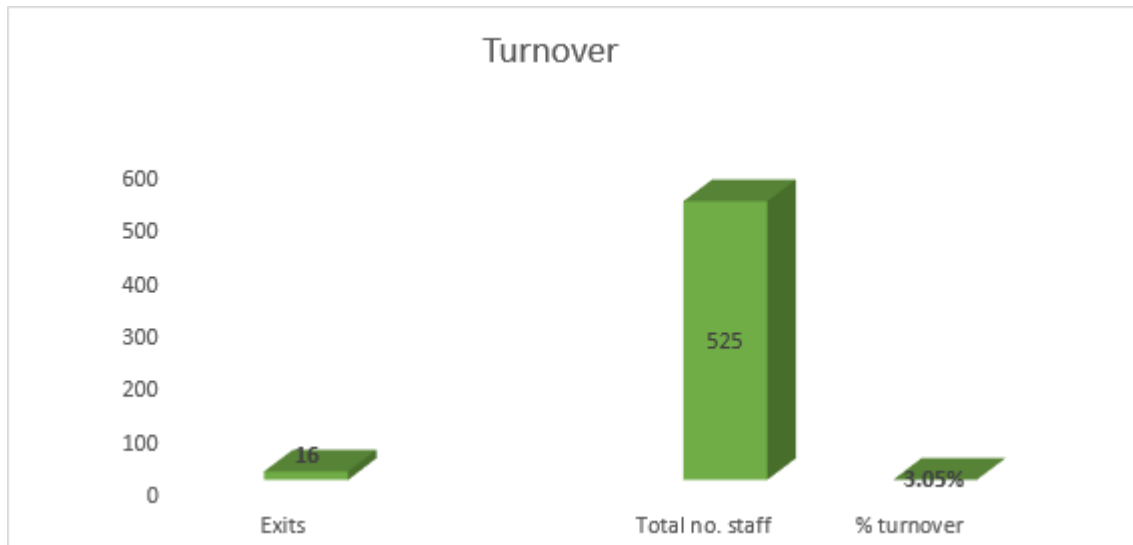
Human Resources Committee



12th November 2025

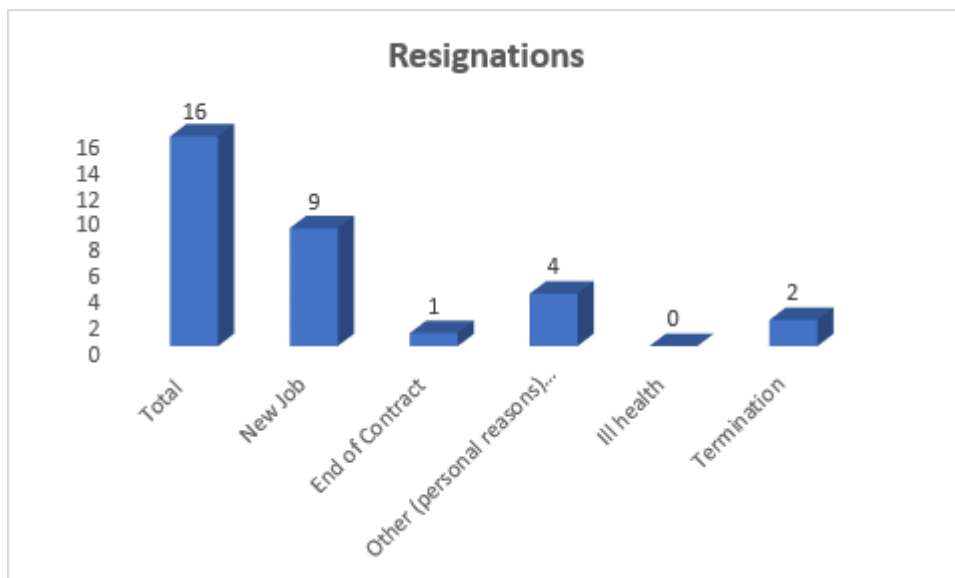
KPI's

Turnover



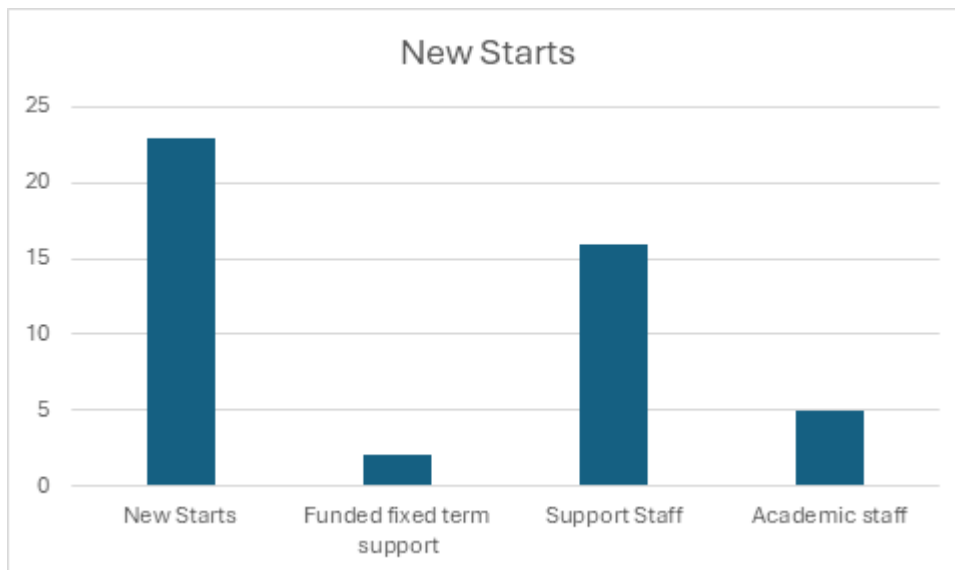
3.05% 1st Aug 25 – 31st Oct 25
 4.56% 1st May 25 – 31st July 25
 2.08% March 2025 – April 2025

Resignations



16 – 1st Aug 25 – 31st Oct 25
 24 – 1st May 25 – 31st July 25
 11 – March 2025 – April 2025

New Starts

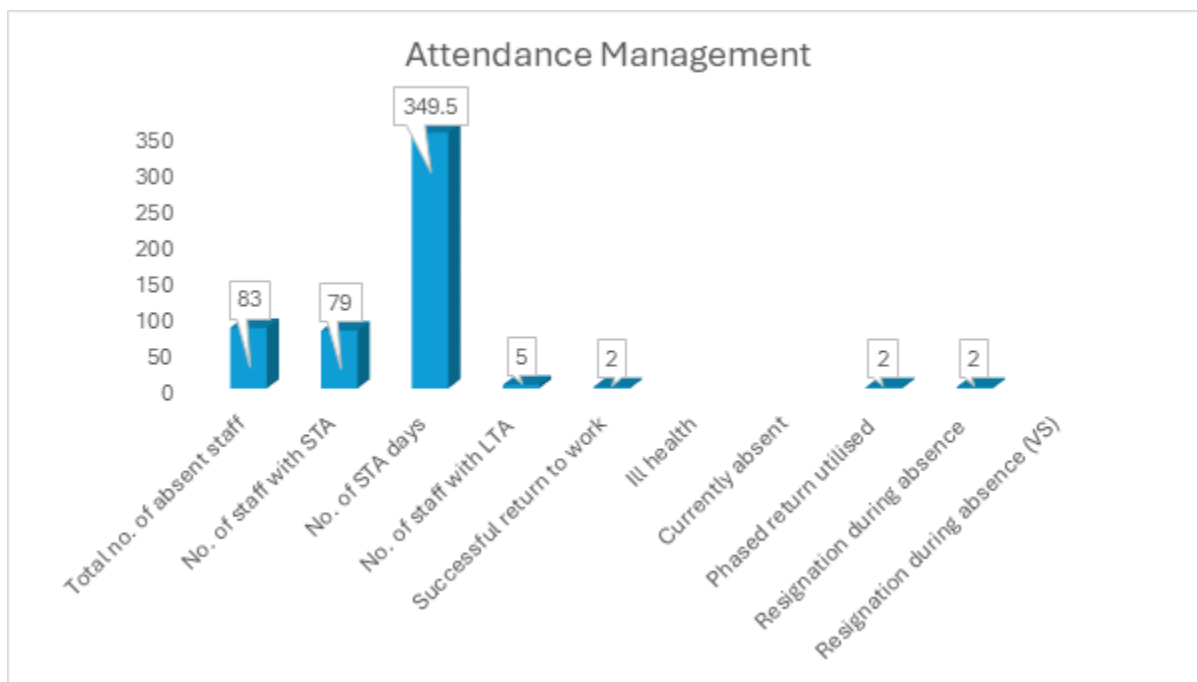


23 – 1st August 25 – 31st October 25

12 – 1st May 25 – 31st July 25

10 – March 2025 – April 2025

Attendance Management



2.03% - 1st August 25 – 31st October 25

2.21% - 1st May 25 – 31st July 25

3.46% March 2025 – April 2025

Absence due to work related stress

1st August 25 – 31st October 2025

2 members of staff were off with work related stress during the reporting period.

Investors in People Review and Findings

IIP were approached to provide an independent review into workplace stress and wellbeing drawing on evidence from the HSE Stress and Wellbeing Survey and a programme of 1-2-1 interviews and focus groups involving 50 staff across the college's 19 campuses.

The discussions offered a vital opportunity to explore the context, meaning and underlying causes of the results in greater depth. They enabled staff to articulate their experiences in their own words, identify nuances not captured by survey metrics ensuring that subsequent actions are grounded in real experience rather than assumption.

Workload and Demands

Workload and job demands emerged as one of the most prominent and consistent themes raised during one-to-one and focus group discussions with staff across UHI – NWH.

Feedback from both academic and professional services staff points to sustained pressure, rising expectations, and diminishing capacity since the merger. While a small number of participants described their work as "busy but manageable," many reported feeling overstretched, under-resourced, and undervalued.

Key Themes

- Excessive Workload and Role Creep
- Insufficient Resourcing and Delays in Recruitment
- Variability, Uncertainty, and Inequity
- Managerial Oversight and Support

This feedback provides evidence of where demands frequently outstrip available capacity, and where structural and procedural challenges are amplifying the strain on staff. The evidence highlights an urgent need to restore equilibrium in workload management, clarify expectations, and reinforce the systems and leadership behaviours that enable staff to thrive.

Roles and Responsibilities

Uncertainty about roles and responsibilities was a prominent and cross-cutting theme in discussions with staff at all levels. This is a natural and expected outcome of large-scale organisational change.

Key Themes

- Unclear Job Descriptions and Inconsistent Expectations
- Role Confusion Within Key Functional Areas
- Complex Structures and Unclear Reporting Lines
- Legacy Issues and the Job Slotting Process
- Emerging Tensions and Silo Working

Overall, the findings indicate that role and responsibility confusion remains a significant barrier to effective integration following the merger. This is not unusual in the early stages of a new organisational structure, particularly one formed from multiple legacy institutions with differing cultures, hierarchies, and terms of reference. It will take time and leadership consistency for new ways of working to bed in.

Management and Organisational Support

The feedback from staff presents a two-tier picture of management and support across UHI – NWH. At a local level, many staff described their immediate line managers as approachable, supportive, and protective, often citing them as the single greatest factor mitigating stress. However, there was a strong and consistent perception of disconnection and distance from senior and executive leadership, with staff describing the organisation as hierarchical, centralised, and slow to respond.

Key Themes

- Strong Line Management Support at Local Level
- Disconnection and Lack of Visibility from Senior Leadership
- Bureaucratic Processes and Centralised Decision-Making
- Communication and Engagement Gaps
- Inconsistent Management Capability and Leadership Development
- Mixed Messages and Erosion of Trust

The overall picture is of an organisation with strong local management foundations but weak strategic connection and leadership alignment. Staff trust their immediate managers but feel disconnected from those setting direction and making decisions. This divide has created an environment where people feel both over-managed and under supported. This tension is fuelling frustration and disengagement. Importantly, these challenges are not unusual in a post-merger context.

Workplace Relationships

Staff accounts portray two competing realities at UHI – NWH. Many describe solid, supportive relationships within immediate teams, yet there is persistent fragmentation across departments, campuses, and legacy boundaries.

Key Themes

- Strong Local Teams, Weak Cross-Team Links
- Legacy Allegiances and a “Them vs Us” Mindset
- Values Not Embedded; Behaviour Expectations Vary
- Integration Gaps: Intros, Induction, and Social Connection
- Hotspots and Perceived Inequities

The relationship landscape is locally resilient but systemically fragile. Strong microcultures are delivering day-to-day support, yet silo working, legacy identity, and uneven behavioural standards inhibit the “one team” culture the merger envisaged. This is a typical post-merger pattern.

Experiences of Change and the Merger

Across all discussions, the merger dominated staff reflections on change. This is unsurprising. The creation of UHI North, West and Hebrides (UHI-NWH) in August 2023 represented a major transformation, affecting every part of the organisation. Many comments reveal that the merger's technical integration (combining systems, policies, and processes) has advanced more quickly than its cultural integration.

Key Themes

- Poor Communication and Lack of Consultation
- Unclear Direction and Rationale for Change
- Lingering Legacy Identities and Cultural Division
- Process Confusion and Ongoing Integration Gaps
- Emotional Impact and Resistance to Change
- Fear of Further Change

The merger was clearly a deeply disruptive and emotional experience for many within UHI – NWH.

Bullying and Harassment

When staff were invited to discuss experiences of bullying and harassment, the responses reflected a mixed picture. The majority reported no personal experience of bullying or harassment and were “shocked” that the HSE survey results identified this as an area of concern. However, a small but concerning number of staff provided examples of behaviour that could constitute bullying or harassment – including shouting, dismissiveness, undermining, passive-aggressive responses and misuse of positional power.

Key Themes

- Limited Personal Experience but High Organisational Sensitivity
- Lack of Clarity and Consistency
- Leadership Behaviour and Cultural Signals
- Fear of Repercussion and Low Confidence in Reporting
- Need for Clearer Standards and Visible Leadership Commitment

The feedback highlights a cultural and communication challenge rather than an epidemic of bullying. Most staff feel respected, but a small number of poor behaviours and inconsistent responses have damaged collective confidence that the college can address such matters fairly.

Health, Wellbeing and Organisational Care

Responses revealed that the college is at the early stages of developing a cohesive wellbeing culture. Most staff were aware of some positive individual initiatives, such as yoga sessions, gym membership discounts, and access to external wellbeing services, but these were often described as fragmented, inconsistently communicated, or poorly understood. A genuine sense that “the college cares” was often missing.

Key Themes

- Limited Awareness and Visibility
- Tactical Rather Than Strategic Interventions
- Workload and Time Barriers
- The Importance of Recognition and Connection
- Leadership Role in Wellbeing

The findings indicate that UHI–NWH has the foundation of a wellbeing framework but lacks a coherent strategy, clear ownership, and effective communication. Staff want reassurance that wellbeing is not just about gym memberships or one-off events, but about feeling valued, supported, and connected to a positive organisational culture.

Rapid Response Group (RRG) – next steps

The RRG will act as a central coordinating body, ensuring that short-term fixes, medium-term development work, and long-term cultural changes are delivered in sequence and evaluated for impact.

The group provides an ideal mechanism to ensure accountability, coordination, and momentum.

Short-Term Priorities (0–6 months)**Visible Leadership Engagement:**

- Reinforce a culture of “Management by Walking Around” to ensure managers are regularly visible and accessible across all campuses.
- Increase opportunities for informal dialogue between the Executive Leadership Team (ELT), Senior Management Team (SMT), and staff at all levels.
- Schedule regular visits and “town hall” sessions led by senior managers to listen to staff concerns, celebrate success, and share organisational priorities.

Clarify Key Roles and Responsibilities:

- Conduct a full review of current job descriptions to ensure they are accurate, consistent, and aligned across the merged organisation.
- Produce a clear and visually engaging organisation chart, exploring digital, interactive, or video-based formats to help staff understand how the structure works and how teams connect.
- Organise roadshows across all campuses to introduce staff to the new organisational structure and clarify team interdependencies.
- Clarify the respective roles of the ELT and SMT -establishing that the ELT leads the college strategically, while the SMT runs the college operationally and is empowered to deliver.
- Complete the finalisation and harmonisation of all organisational policies, procedures and processes, ensuring they are clearly communicated, easily accessible, and supported by targeted training for all staff affected.
- Develop a consistent and structured induction process for all new staff, ensuring they are introduced to the organisation’s purpose, structure, culture, policies, and

expectations, and understand how their role contributes to the wider mission of UHI – NWH.

Workload Management and Resourcing:

- Review immediate workload hotspots and resourcing bottlenecks to prioritise areas of highest strain.
- Introduce improved meeting management practices, ensuring meetings have a clear purpose, agenda, and defined outcomes to save staff time.
- Conduct proactive workforce planning that aligns staffing capacity, capability, and deployment with student demand and strategic objectives.
- Streamline decision-making processes to reduce bureaucracy and empower middle managers to act within defined parameters.
- Define clear and consistent parameters for hybrid working across the organisation, balancing flexibility with the need to encourage regular on-campus attendance to support collaboration, relationship-building, and a stronger sense of community.

Reaffirm Dignity and Respect Standards:

- Re-launch the Dignity and Respect Policy, reinforcing a zero-tolerance stance on bullying, harassment, and disrespectful behaviour.
- Establish trained “Respect at Work” contacts on each campus to provide confidential advice and early intervention.
- Introduce a confidential whistleblowing and reporting line for staff to raise concerns safely and anonymously.
- Provide training for all managers on identifying, preventing, and addressing unacceptable behaviour.

Enhance Wellbeing Visibility and Support:

- Increase the number of trained Mental Health First Aiders across all sites, ensuring broad coverage and clear visibility of who they are and what support they provide.
- Develop a central, easily navigable Wellbeing Hub on SharePoint with links to all available support, policies, and self-help resources.
- Implement regular pulse checks to track employee wellbeing and engagement between regular full employee surveys.
- Encourage visible leadership endorsement of wellbeing activities and integrate wellbeing metrics into performance reporting.

Early Steps toward a Wellbeing Strategy:

- Develop a comprehensive Wellbeing Strategy that aligns to UHI – NWH’s mission and strategic goals, clearly defining responsibilities, measures of success, and reporting lines.
- Position wellbeing as a strategic pillar of organisational success, linked explicitly to engagement, retention, and performance outcomes.

Organisation Structure Review

The initial assessment of the structure effectiveness and identification of immediate concerns/mitigating actions is due to be launched on 25th November 2025.

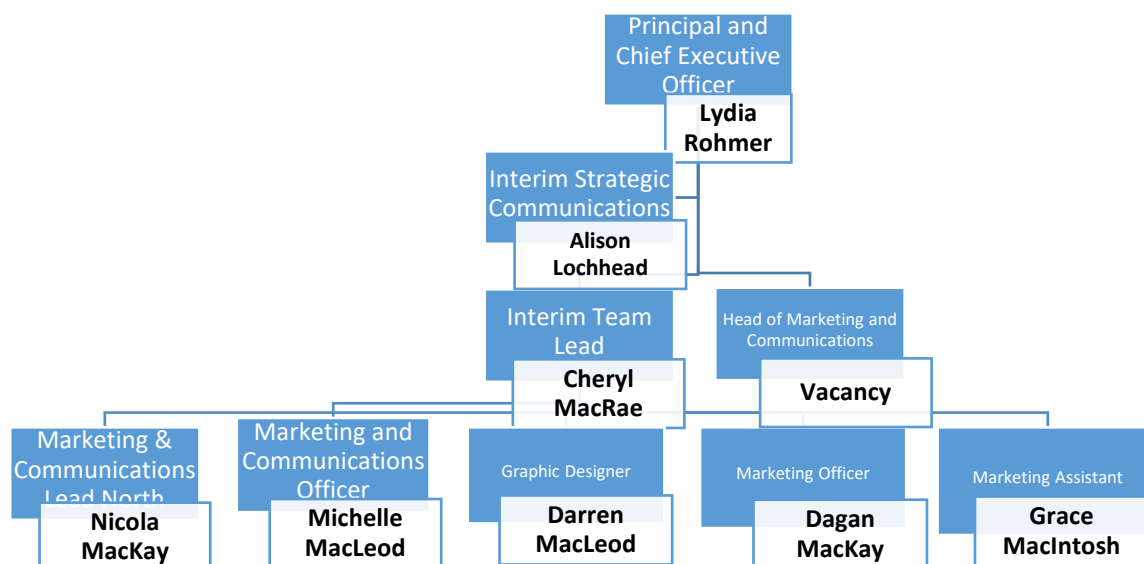
This assessment collides with the work of the Rapid Response Group and the Year 2 Merger Evaluation Report, however there is a commitment to carry out the assessment.

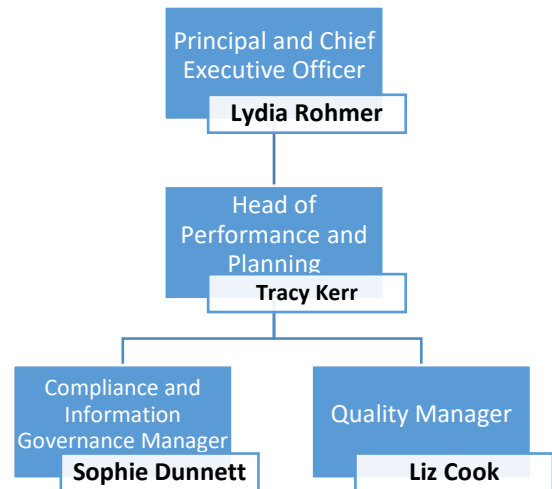
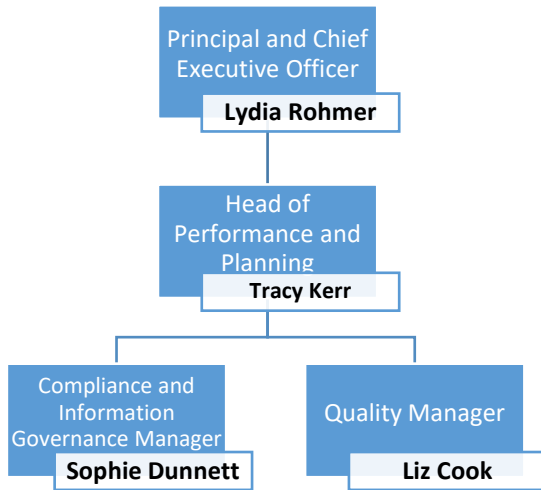
Suggested focus groups:

- Curriculum 1
- Curriculum 2
- Curriculum Professional Services
- Student Experience
- Research & Knowledge Exchange
- Infrastructure
- Enterprise, Engagement and Marketing
- Finance & HR
- Performance & Planning and PA's

The facilitator for each group will be most senior person in each group who will lead on 8 set questions. Facilitators will then produce a bullet point report covering all questions.

Update on Staff Changes





National Bargaining Update

National Job Evaluation

The business case for national job evaluation was presented to SFC and Scottish Government. A response has been received from SFC, and they have indicated that the business case needs to go through an intensive process called the ‘Green Book Process.’

The working group is drafting a response to SFC however the timeframes projected will now no longer be possible.

The Project Plan was based on the evaluation of 12approx. 2000-2500 roles and based on the recent data gathering exercise from colleges this number is now between 4500 and 5500. As this increase has a significant impact on the project timeline, circa an additional 12 – 18 months.

Support Staff Pay Award

The pay offer has been accepted and is now subject to Scottish Government approval for the additional funding. Once this has been provided unions will go out to ballot.

Trade Unions have advised they can turn the ballot round in two -three weeks so potentially looking at implementation in the November pay run.

National Policies – Grievance Policy

The Grievance Policy had been agreed however further work is required on the procedure. Trade Unions would like the reference to the informal stage removed and the employers side disagree with this.

Going forward it will only be policies that are developed as this is what is referred to in the NRPA.

UHI North, West and Hebrides Job Evaluation

Following the pay mapping process UHI North, West and Hebrides committed to a job evaluation process. The evaluation of the job roles performed by support staff will be conducted externally by the Educational Competencies Consortium using the FEDRA system, which is the Job Evaluation tool of choice for the sector.

Each role within the College will be evaluated with a FEDRA “score” created. This will form the basis of our Pay and Grading structure going forward.

The evaluation of each job role will be based on Job Descriptions, that are up-to-date, comprehensive and agreed by the staff carrying out those roles.

This process is due to commence in the next few weeks.

Unresolved Dispute Items Update

1. Staff Stress Survey roll out

Complete

2. The Structure + PL1 Positions – Referred to the joint secretaries.

*The Joint Secretaries note that Circular 02/17 was originally agreed for a specific purpose, namely, to job match existing Promoted Lecturers in post in 2017 to the new National Fixed Points. Some colleges have subsequently referred to the Circular as guidance in their recruitment and restructuring processes. The NJNC – Side Table (Lecturing) is going to work on agreeing a revised Circular imminently. The Joint Secretaries recommend that **Appendix 1 (Role Profile Criteria)** continue to be used by colleges as interim guidance until a revised agreement is developed. The Joint Secretaries believe that the branch and the college need to discuss the job descriptions in the context of a grading process, using **Circular 02/17 – Appendix 1, Circular 02/21** and the National Working Practices Agreement to assist this process, seeking to reach an agreement on the grading of the posts and job descriptions in question.*

John Anderson

Sarah Collins

Management Side Joint Secretary Staff Side Joint Secretary

3. The Island Community Impact Assessment

On 14th October a complaint was lodged with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman that the University of the Highlands and Islands did not conduct a suitable Island Communities Impact Assessment before the merger of UHI North Highland, UHI Outer Hebrides and UHI West Highland.

We will receive an update on their initial assessment within the next eight weeks

[Year 2 Merger Evaluation Report Update](#)

Verbal update - LR

[Policy and Compliance](#)

- Dignity at Work Policy
- Grievance policy
- Time off in lieu - Procedure