

IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF THE UHI NORTH, WEST & HEBRIDES CURRICULUM CHANGE OF SERVICE IN YEAR 1 (ACADEMIC YEAR 23/24)

Project name: UHI North, West & Hebrides Merger Implementation & Integration

Document code:

Issue date: 16 Oct 2024

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Version: 1.0

Approval

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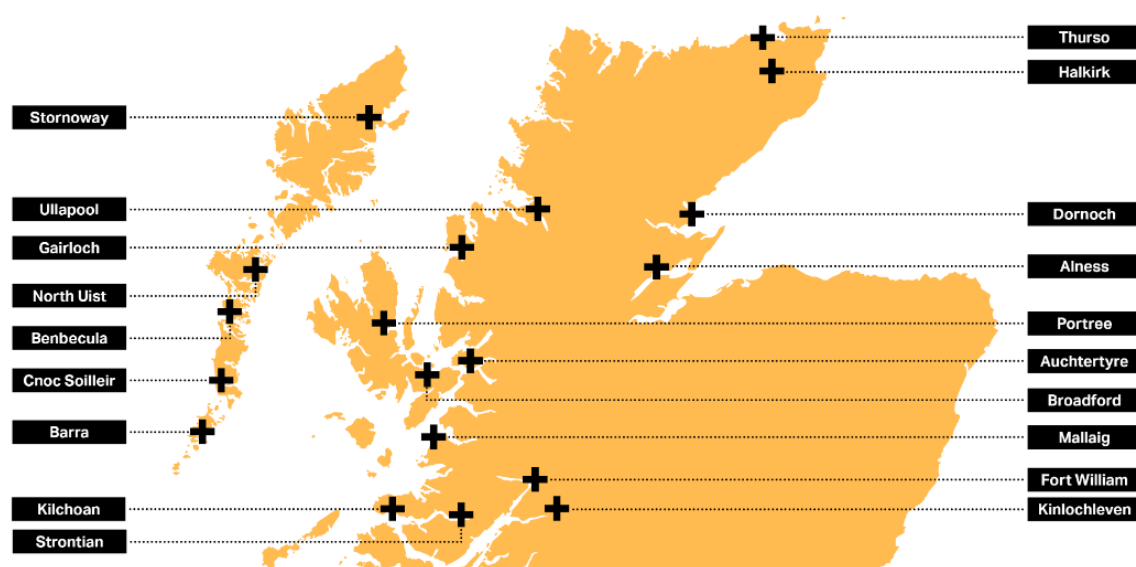
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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 College Merger

On 1st August 2023 three colleges in the University of the Highlands & Islands (UHI) partnership – UHI North Highland (NH), UHI Outer Hebrides (OH) and UHI West Highland (WH) – merged to create a single college: UHI North, West & Hebrides (UHI NW). The merger was pursued by the 3 college boards of management because, despite their collective successes, their future viability was at risk given major financial and demographic challenges. The boards voted unanimously in favour of merger in November 2022, and the Merger Proposal & Business Case was ratified through the Scottish Parliament in June 2023, paving the way for legal vesting of the new College.



1.2 Curriculum Ambitions of the Merged College

The curriculum and student-related strategic goals of the new College include plans to: increase the learning offer, widen access through multi-modal delivery models, provide up-to-date and relevant curriculum for communities, and increase the viability of programmes. This overall approach aims to create more opportunities for people to learn with UHI NW by providing options for people to study from home, or work, within its rural and island communities; and/or attend on campus; or learn from anywhere in the world.

Immediately following merger the College implemented a Curriculum Review to reorganise the range and delivery of the curriculum inherited from the 3 legacy colleges for academic year 23/24. This *change of service* affects staff, students and communities associated with all 19 UHI NW sites, illustrated above. This includes several island communities: the Isle of Barra, Isle of Benbecula, Isle of South Uist, Isle of North Uist, Isle of Lewis and the Isle of Skye.

1.3 Scope of impact assessment

Given the UHI's obligations as a "Relevant Authority" in accordance with the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, the University has compiled an impact assessment that evaluates the impact of the *change of service* resulting from the updated UHI NW Curriculum for

academic year 23/24 – *Year 1 of the newly merged College* - across the College's geography. From an islands perspective the assessment follows the steps of the Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) process that determine if an actual ICIA is required. These steps are:

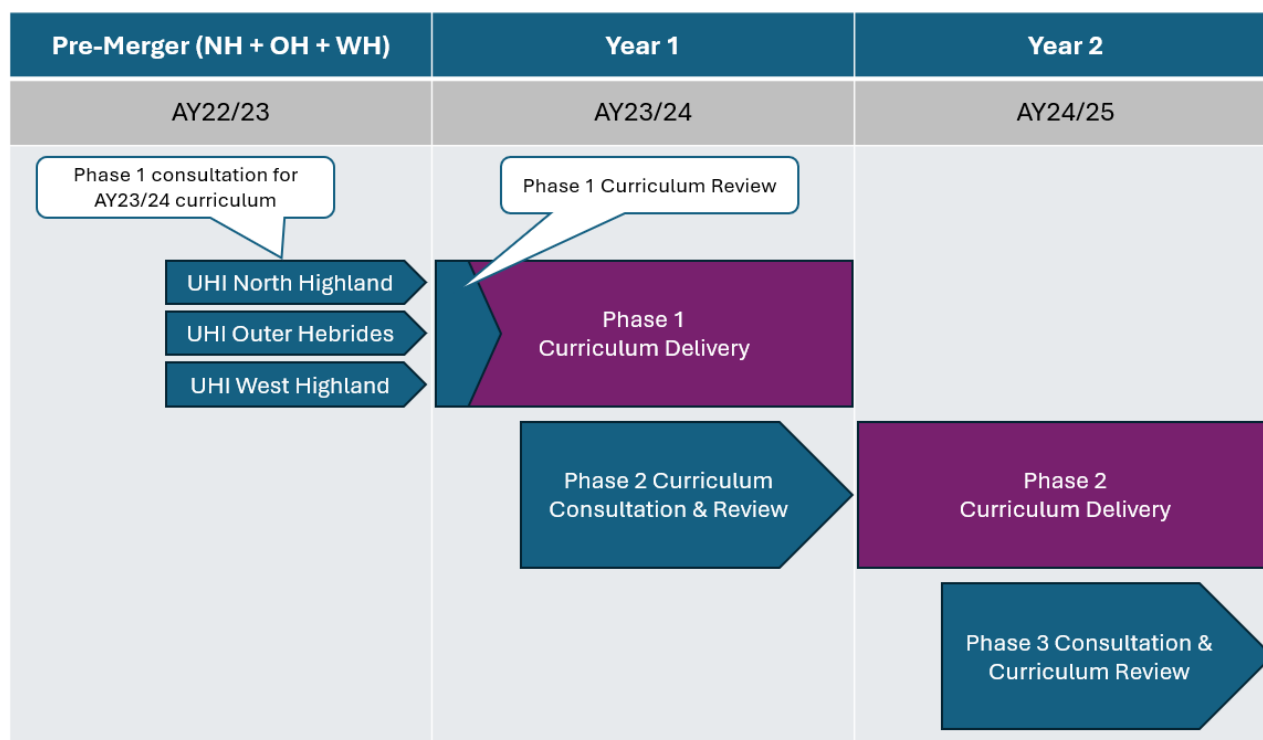
1. Develop a clear understanding of the objectives;
2. Gather data and identify stakeholders;
3. Consultation;
4. Assessment of requirement for an ICIA;
5. Preparing the ICIA (if required, otherwise move to step 6);
6. Making adjustments to the work;
7. Publishing the ICIA.

This impact assessment is focused specifically on the updated UHINWH Curriculum for Year 1 of the merged College's operation (academic year 23/24). The College's Organisation Design strategy has been addressed in a separate impact assessment.

The full impact assessment report will be published internally, and this executive summary will be published externally in English and Gaelic, via the UHI and UHINWH websites.

1.4 Assessment Findings

The Curriculum Review process implemented by the merged College involved consultation with stakeholders followed by evaluation of every course against criteria that assessed demand, delivery model, viability, performance and need (ie market demand). This standard methodology was applied to all courses at all delivery locations. UHINWH's Curriculum Review approach is illustrated below:



The impact assessment has evaluated the Curriculum Review activities that underpinned the delivery of curriculum in Year 1, including the change of service resulting from the

modified curriculum offering delivered that year. The assessment demonstrates that there is not a significantly different effect on any of the College sites, including islands-based sites, due to the following:

- Curriculum review is a perpetual process undertaken by colleges across all locations to evaluate which courses to stop, start, modify and/or continue.
- In planning its Year 1 curriculum offer, UHINWH applied a standard review methodology across all courses at all delivery locations.
- Consultation with stakeholders (especially staff, students, schools and Board members) relating to the AY23/24 curriculum offer took place during the year before merger by the legacy colleges across their respective regions.
- The delivery model for a small number of courses was changed from in-person delivery to online delivery affecting courses previously delivered in-person at Stornoway (Isle of Lewis), Thurso (Caithness) and Alness (Easter Ross).
- Changing specific courses to online delivery increased their accessibility to a much wider range of students residing in rural and island locations.
- All UHINWH sites remained available to all students to use their academic and support resources and facilities.
- Where courses were withdrawn, credible and relevant alternatives were offered in all cases.
- One course which was paused for review of its viability was retained after consultation with the local community. The course has been replaced for AY24/25 with an improved alternative.

In conclusion, the University believes that the changes resulting from the UHI North, West, & Hebrides revised curriculum for academic year 23/24 will not have an effect on any island community which is significantly different from the effects on other communities (including other island communities) and on this basis a fuller and more detailed Islands Community Impact Assessment is not required.

1.5 Adjustments

Further work being undertaken or planned by the College includes continuation of the Curriculum Review process for academic year 25/26 onwards, further highlighting the availability of resources and support available for student use at all sites, and trend monitoring of student home locations across courses.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 UHI and UHI North, West & Hebrides

On 1st August 2023 three colleges in the University of the Highlands & Islands (UHI) partnership – UHI North Highland, UHI Outer Hebrides and UHI West Highland – merged to create one tertiary education institution: UHI North, West & Hebrides (UHINWH).

UHINWH is part of the UHI partnership of 11 partners comprising colleges, specialist institutions¹ and the University itself (“UHI”). The UHI partnership is more than a traditional university and prides itself on delivering further education, higher education and world-class research to over 36,000 students per year, across its partnership campus of 70 teaching and learning centres.

Since merger, the new College has implemented an ongoing Curriculum Review process to consolidate and refine the range of HE and FE curriculum it provides. Phase 1 of the Review centred on the reorganisation of curriculum to be delivered in Year 1 of the College (academic year 23/24). Subsequent Review phases focused on which courses would be delivered in academic year (“AY”) 24/25 and beyond.

This Year 1 change of service has implications for students and communities across all UHINWH’s sites, which includes several island communities. The UHINWH Merger Proposal and Business Caseⁱ included an Equality Impact Assessment which stated that “*Due consideration will also be given to the UHI’s obligations regarding Island Communities Impact Assessments*”. This refers to UHI’s obligations as a “Relevant Authority” with responsibilities under the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018ⁱⁱ (the “Act”): in particular, sections 7 and 8 of the Act.

2.2 Document Purpose

This document is an impact assessment of the updated UHINWH Curriculum for Year 1 of the merged College’s operation (AY23/24). From an islands perspective this assessment follows the steps of the Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) processⁱⁱⁱ ***that determine if a full ICIA is required.***

2.3 Assessment Scope

This assessment specifically evaluates the impact of the *change of service* during Year 1 of UHINWH’s operations resulting from changes to curriculum delivery in AY23/24. These changes were made as a result of the College’s Curriculum Review Phase 1 outcomes, the process for which is detailed at [section 3.4](#). UHINWH operates 19 centres across the North and West Highlands, Skye, and Outer Hebrides (Figure 1, overleaf). The impact of the College’s restructure, which resulted from its Organisation Design strategy, has been addressed in a separate impact assessment.

Therefore, this assessment evaluates if there would be a unique impact on students and communities at specific locations because of the Curriculum change of service in Year 1. If

¹ See map at [Appendix 1](#).

the assessment identifies a unique adverse impact on islands-based locations, then the full ICIA process would be implemented for the location concerned.

3 BACKGROUND CONTEXT: UHINWH

3.1 College Overview

The merger to form UHINWH created an anchor institution of scale and impact within UHI, and the region, supporting approximately 9000 students and 600 staff across 19 learning centres and campuses stretching across the North and West Highlands, Skye and Outer Hebrides. UHINWH aims to have a transformative impact on its communities by encouraging people to live, work and study here by providing opportunities for people to shape their futures in a changing world.

Through a range of courses at all levels, UHINWH removes barriers to learning and providing pathways for students. Students can join UHINWH on a course that suits their needs, progress from one level of qualification to the next, and leave with a qualification when the time is right for them. Its flexible delivery model is driven by digital innovation to make the curriculum more accessible. This creates more opportunities for people to learn with UHINWH, providing options for people to study from home, or work, within its rural and island communities; and/or attend on campus; or learn remotely from anywhere in the world.

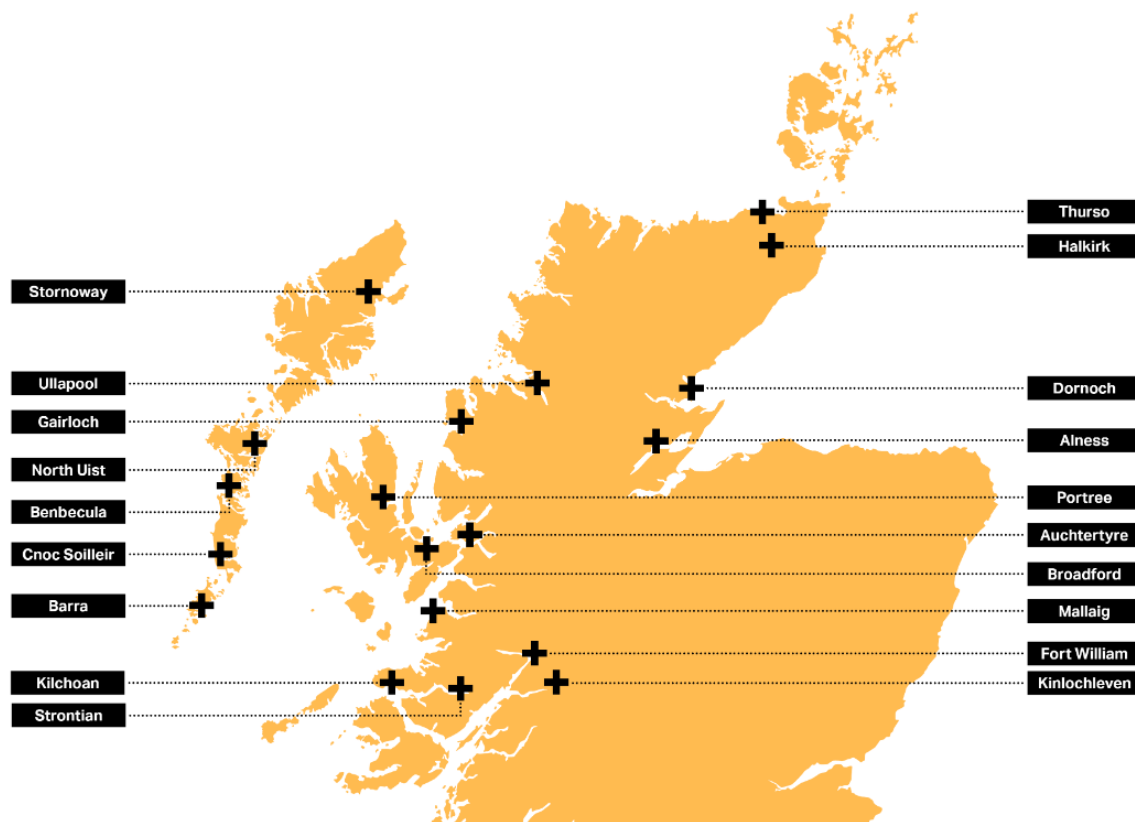


Figure 1: UHINWH locations

3.2 Merger Background

As single organisations, the 3 legacy colleges each supported their local communities by providing access to learning at all levels; training and skills development for local employers; and world-class research. However, the boards of management of these colleges recognised that despite their collective successes they could no longer continue as they had. The colleges were small, facing flat funding for several years, experiencing unprecedented running costs and were operating across dispersed communities with small, declining populations. In early 2021 the boards commissioned a review of their long-term strategic future, leading to creation of a partnership board to explore merger. Following initial consultation in early 2022 with students and staff, publication of the full Merger Proposal and Business Caseⁱ and then a 10-week public consultation, in November 2022 the boards of management voted unanimously in favour of merger.

The Merger Proposal and Business Case was submitted to the Scottish Government where it was approved by the Minister for Higher Education & Further Education and by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, and ratified through the Scottish Parliament in June 2023. This enabled the legal vesting of UHINWH to take place on 1st August 2023.

The overall aim has been to create a more sustainable organisation with combined capacity and resource to grow the curriculum, research, and innovation; develop existing and new partnerships to support employers to address skills gaps and retain, attract, and nurture talent; and become more responsive to the social, cultural, and economic opportunities in its regions.

3.3 Strategic Objectives

The College's Mission is:

To connect rural and island Scotland, pioneering distinctive education and research opportunities to enable our students and communities to shape their future in a changing world.

To realise that Mission, the College's strategic objectives are as follows:

Strategic goal	Benefits
To become a financially sustainable, joined up organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Longevity of college+ Continued access to tertiary education across region+ Equality of opportunity and experience across region
To grow curriculum, particularly in key areas that link with our research and commercial opportunities (blue and green economies/Gaelic language)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Increased learning offer+ Widened access through multi-modal delivery model+ Up to date, relevant curriculum for communities+ Being a credible choice for local, regional and international students+ Increased alignment to Scottish Government priorities and regional needs.

Strategic goal	Benefits
To grow research and knowledge exchange through connecting our current specialisms and developing them alongside our region's potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Increased research income + Enhanced research profile + Upskilling of staff and local communities + Growth of knowledge exchange
To have cohesive and responsive business development teams who can respond effectively and purposefully to opportunities of scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Coordinated, responsive networks across the region + Multi-region teams who cross collaborate to provide training solutions and knowledge exchange in multiple locations + Single point of contact for key industry stakeholders + Resource to identify opportunities and respond proactively
To enhance the student experience through connecting our sites, resources, communities and multi-location programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Increased student retention + High student satisfaction + Inward migration + More viable programmes + Enhanced student culture
To have resilient team structures and depth of resource to address changing priorities, opportunities and economic difficulties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Efficiency in services through specialist teams + Efficient and consistent processes for students + Efficiency and resilience through combined resource, reduced dependences + Joint delivery of curriculum by diverse teaching staff + Capacity within curriculum to focus on new and innovative ways of delivering learning + Service improvements

3.4 Curriculum Review Process

3.4.1 Overview

All colleges and universities review their curriculum offering at least annually to assess their relevance and market demand to decide which courses to stop, start or continue. The challenge for UHINWH's first year was how to organise the delivery of curriculum immediately post-merger. A decision was taken at an early stage of merger preparations, for applications for AY23/24 courses to be taken on a legacy college basis to provide the best continuity and minimum disruption for students; and thereafter for UHINWH to offer a single college curriculum offer from AY24/25.

To consolidate and update the UHINWH curriculum, the College implemented a Curriculum Review process to bring about the transformation needed to ensure continuity of subject choice, improved local access, improved quality of delivery, increased sustainable and coherent course progression pathways, strengthened connection to place and stakeholders and increased overall viability and efficiency in line with the College's overarching sustainability and development plans.

The Curriculum Review has taken a planned and considered three-phase approach which is commonly used by the tertiary education sector and was used by the legacy colleges. It was informed by the original merger business case, the work undertaken since then in AY22/23 by the curriculum workstream, national and local needs, external and internal data and relevant strategies. Both past and current data has been used for objectively reviewing courses and curriculum areas against a set of criteria. Each review phase involves a panel using a clear decision-making protocol.

The Review complemented the UHI 2024 curriculum review and uses all associated guidance relating to teaching grant and curriculum delivery. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) adjusts educational guidance each year and, for example, the college sector guidance issued in June 2023 required considerable late-stage adjustment to the planned AY23/24 curriculum.

3.4.2 Method

All College curriculum delivery was in scope for the Review and included further and higher education and all modes and types of delivery. The work was led by the interim vice-principal and director of curriculum in collaboration with all College curriculum managers and course and programme leaders. Consultation was undertaken with senior staff, for example, the Principal and interim executive team and those people in senior management positions from Curriculum, QA, Admissions/Registry, Student Services, Finance and HR. The final decisions within the curriculum review would be made by the College executive leadership team.

The criteria used for review was based on demand, optimised delivery and financial viability, past performance (KPIs and student experience) and strategic need – as detailed in the following table:

Demand	Recruitment (number of students taught together as a group).
Optimised delivery	Incorporation of digital delivery; digitisation of almost all learning resources; use of VLE; integration and teaching of several levels and part time; theory teaching across group; shared delivery.
Viability	Measured against the financial course contribution.
Performance	Student retention, success, student experience and positive destination over time
Need	Strategic fit and is measured against national, regional and local need and as outlined in the curriculum strategy.

Once courses were assessed in this way a decision could be made for each as follows - either:

- Continue the course as is;
- continue with required optimisation/amendments;

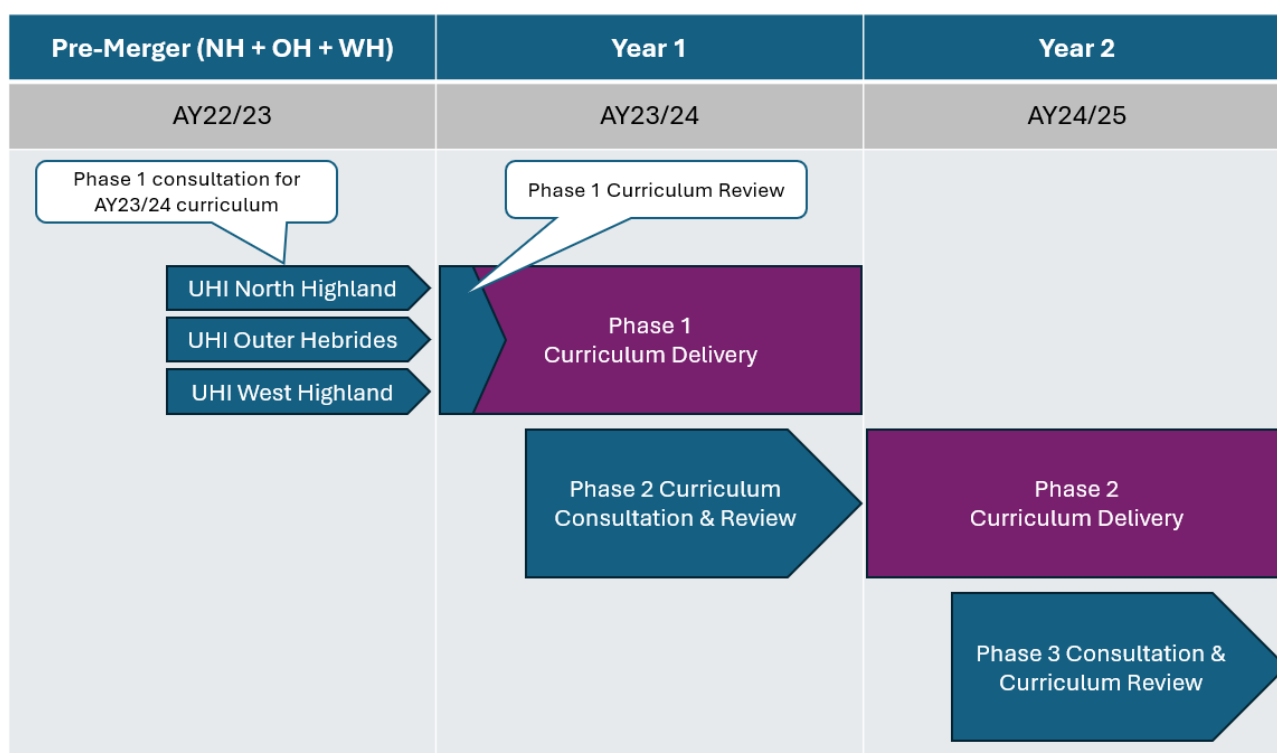
- pause and review within a required timeframe;
- or discontinuation of the course

This method was used for Phase 1 of the Review, to finalise the AY23/24 curriculum offering. Phase 2 of the review would go on to evaluate the following for AY24/25:

- new courses, and pausing or discontinuation of existing courses
- improving underperforming curriculum
- harmonising course delivery approaches
- consolidation of courses/programmes where there are multiple qualification types at the same level, eg NQ, NC, SVQ

Curriculum Review Phase 3 will introduce a 3-year rolling planning/review cycle for AY25/26 onwards. The timeline of the curriculum review phases is illustrated below.

Figure 2: UHINWH Curriculum Review phases



4 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This section of the document explains the Impact Assessment's evaluation undertaken by following the initial steps of the ICIA process (as detailed in Scottish Government guidance^{iv}) – a method which this impact assessment has applied to all UHINWH locations, specifying

islands aspects where applicable - with the corresponding findings, such as whether any locations require an ICIA to be completed.

4.1 STEP ONE – *Develop a clear understanding of your objectives*

- What are the objectives of the policy, strategy or service?
- Do you need to consult?
- How are College locations identified – including those on islands – for the purpose of the policy, strategy or service?
- What are the intended impacts/outcomes and how do these potentially differ across UHINWH locations, including those on the islands?
- Is the policy, strategy or service new?

The Curriculum Review process was intended to modify an existing service, namely the provision of tertiary education courses to students and communities previously served by the 3 legacy colleges. For AY23/24 the Phase 1 Review's priority was to analyse all courses using the methodology explained in [section 3.4](#) and determine which courses should continue, and whether any courses should be modified, paused or discontinued. Subsequent phases of the Review will consolidate the range of courses into a 'one college' curriculum offering that removes duplication, widens access, enhances quality and increases curriculum relevance for UHINWH's communities and stakeholders.

All UHINWH sites are listed in the map at Figure 1, and islands-based College locations are as follows:

- Outer Hebrides
 - [Barra](#), Isle of Barra
 - [Benbecula](#), Isle of Benbecula
 - [Cnoc Soilleir](#), Isle of South Uist
 - [North Uist](#), Isle of North Uist
 - [Stornoway](#), Isle of Lewis
- Isle of Skye
 - [Broadford](#)
 - [Portree](#)

Changes to Year 1 curriculum were based on the planned AY23/24 range of courses offered by the legacy colleges pre-merger. Amalgamating the courses into one portfolio prior to merger would have necessitated amalgamation of the applications process. This was not feasible in the time available and would have led to major disruption to student recruitment at that time – both in the UHINWH region (including its islands locations) and further afield for those applying for fully online courses. The applications systems were amalgamated into one UHINWH system in readiness for AY24/25.

The outcomes of Curriculum Review Phase 1 and any implications for islands are detailed in the next sections.

4.2 STEP TWO – *Gather your data and identify your stakeholders*

- What data is available about the current situation across UHINWH's geography – including in the islands?
- Do you need to consult?
- How does any existing data differ between locations / between islands?
- Are there any existing design features or mitigations in place?

UHINWH data was available detailing all courses across the legacy colleges, including their locations and methods of delivery. For the Phase 1 review all curriculum managers and course/programme leaders were consulted on the evaluation of the courses and the eventual proposed revisions. A long-standing obligation for these staff is that they must be in contact with employers, schools and community stakeholders routinely to enable them to maintain up-to-date awareness of College courses' relevance, progression routes and value to communities, students and industry. Maintaining this 'market' knowledge enables them to apply appropriate insights and considerations to the Review process and to updating of individual course content.

The data differs between locations because different College locations deliver different courses based on local need, based on the range of curriculum that the merged College inherited from the legacy colleges. Maintaining the range and relevance of curriculum available to students and communities across the College's geography will be ensured by the ongoing Curriculum Review process described previously. The ethos of the ongoing Review(s) is directly aligned to the College's curriculum-related strategic goal: *increasing the learning offer, widening access through multi-modal delivery model, and providing up to date, relevant curriculum for communities.*

4.3 STEP THREE – *Consultation*

- Who do you need to consult with? / How will you carry out your consultation and in what timescales?
- What questions will you ask when considering how to address rural and island realities?
- What information has already been gathered through consultations and what concerns have been raised previously by island communities?
- Is your consultation robust and meaningful and sufficient to comply with the Section 7 duty?

For the Phase 1 review curriculum managers and course/programme leaders were in discussion with the stakeholders described in [section 4.2](#), including students, colleagues, board members and schools. This took place as routine business in the previous academic year (22/23). Given that was prior to merger, the consultation was conducted on a legacy college basis, geographically, hence rural and island factors were automatically considered within that process.

Concerns were raised by one island community about some Further Education courses and some HNC/D courses being changed to virtual class online delivery. Face-to-face delivery in Stornoway was not sustainable for these courses because it was no longer financially viable. Moving to online in some courses was a change in the Stornoway campus, but it was also a change in the campuses of Thurso and Alness in Caithness and Easter Ross respectively. Delivering a range of full-time and part-time courses through virtual classrooms online opened opportunities to students in other island communities. People in Isle of Barra, Isle of Benbecula, Isle of South Uist, Isle of North Uist and Isle of Harris now have access to a range of courses that were available only to people in Stornoway, prior to merger.

Phase 2 review consultation for Year 2 (AY24/25) took place with current students, schools, staff, board members and communities over a period of 5 months. The aim for AY24/25 was to continue to deliver subjects that were already delivered in different locations and to consider what new curriculum was needed, based on evidence of demand and community needs.

Should UHI, as a Relevant Authority, need to conduct an ICIA in this instance then the consultation undertaken as described in this and in the previous section is sufficient to comply with its section 7 duty of having regard to island communities in carrying out its functions.

4.4 STEP FOUR – Assessment

- **Does your assessment identify any unique impacts on UHINWH locations / between islands?**
- **Does your assessment identify any potential barriers or wider impacts? How will you address these?**
- **Is the change of Curriculum likely to have an effect on an island community which is significantly different from its effect on other communities (including other island communities).**

The following summarises AY23/24 (Year 1) curriculum changes that affected islands locations:

- As happens every academic year some courses did not recruit sufficient students to run. Due to extremely low numbers one full-time practical course did not start in Portree in AY23/24. This affected 2 applicants and although the College offered them alternative courses, these were not of interest. The course was offered for applications for AY24/25 and is running successfully.
- Similarly the College withdrew the delivery of a Further Education-level horticulture course due to historic low numbers and only two applications for AY23/24. In its place the Curriculum staff worked together to design a very successful Countryside and Wildlife HNC and HND which are both delivered from Stornoway. This provides progression options for students at a higher level and opens up a number career routes in the islands, particularly in relation to renewables and land management.

- One full-time practical course in Art had been paused at Taigh Chearsabhagh on North Uist, due to low numbers of applicants. Following consultation with the local community it was reinstated for AY23/24 and successfully delivered in a shorter timespan than normal. For AY24/25 onwards the course has been replaced at Taigh Chearsabhagh by NC Art & Design at SCQF level 6, as part of the NC Creative industries portfolio.

4.4.1 Assessment Key Findings

The analysis in this document demonstrates that there is not a significantly different effect on any of the College sites, including islands-based sites. The key findings which support this are:

- Curriculum review is an annual and perpetual process for colleges to evaluate which courses to stop, start, modify and/or continue.
- In planning its AY23/24 (year 1) curriculum offer, UHINWH applied a standard review methodology that assessed demand, delivery model, viability, performance and need (ie market demand) across all courses at all delivery locations.
- Consultation with stakeholders (especially staff, students, schools and Board members) relating to the AY23/24 curriculum offer took place the year before (as part of the rolling review process) and hence was conducted by the pre-merger legacy colleges across their respective regions.
- The delivery model for a small number of courses was changed from in-person delivery to online delivery. This affected courses that were previously delivered in-person at Stornoway (Isle of Lewis), Thurso (Caithness) and Alness (Easter Ross).
- Changing some courses from in-person to online delivery increased the accessibility of these courses to a much wider range of students residing in rural and island locations.
- Irrespective of course delivery method, all UHINWH sites were available to students to use their academic and support resources and facilities.
- Where courses were withdrawn for AY23/24, credible and relevant alternatives were offered in all cases.
- One course which was paused for review of its viability was continued and successfully completed after consultation with the local community. The course has been replaced for AY24/25 with an improved alternative.

In conclusion, the University believes that the changes resulting from the UHI North, West, & Hebrides revised curriculum for academic year 23/24 will not have an effect on any island community which is significantly different from the effects on other communities (including other island communities) and on this basis a fuller and more detailed Islands Community Impact Assessment is not required.

4.5 STEP FIVE – *Preparing the ICIA – Not Required*

As explained in the previous section, an ICIA is not required.

4.6 STEP SIX – *Making adjustments*

- **Should delivery mechanisms/mitigations vary in different communities?**
- **Do you need to return to the consultation participants in respect of mechanisms or mitigations?**
- **Have island circumstances been factored into the evaluation process?**

The College will continue to apply its Curriculum Review methodology as described in [section 3.4](#) on a rolling basis, to assess demand, viability and performance of the courses on offer in order to determine what changes are needed. This method will be applied consistently across all locations. The students' needs – wherever they are studying – will continue to be at the forefront of the process, along with the ambition to increase the effectiveness, flexibility, relevance and accessibility of UHINWH courses for the widest possible audience.

The College will reflect on further actions needed to ensure rural and island communities' considerations are integral to decision making on future curriculum changes. These include:

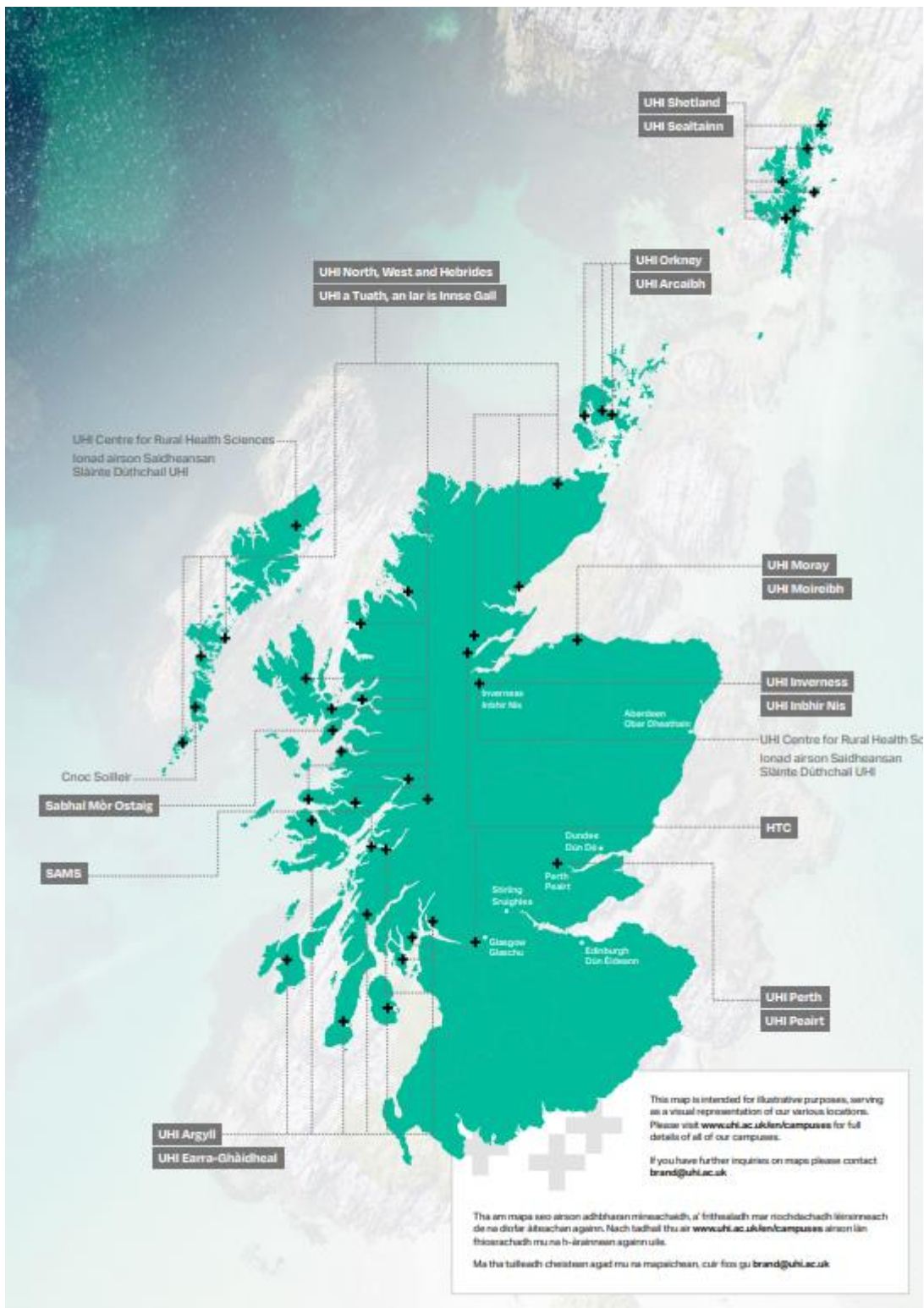
- From AY25/26 onwards, conducting annual analysis of student home locations by postcode to monitor trends across the curriculum offer.
- A targeted publicity campaign to students on the facilities and resources they can access at their nearest UHINWH location, irrespective of their level or model of study.

4.7 STEP SEVEN – Publishing the Impact Assessment

- Does it need to be presented in Gaelic or any other language?
- Where will you publish your ICIA and will relevant stakeholders be able to easily access it?
- Confirm appropriate level of sign off?

- The Impact Assessment will be published in two formats
 - The full document will be shared with UHI senior management and UHINWH senior management, Board and staff.
 - The executive summary will be published as a stand-alone document in English and Gaelic on the UHI website.
- The document has been compiled by the UHI Programme Director for Merger Implementation & Integration and will be signed off by the UHI Director of Transformation on behalf of the University.

Appendix 1 – Map of UHI Locations



References

- i <https://nwh.uhi.ac.uk/en/t4-media/one-web/nwh/about-us/merger-background/RICM-Merger-Proposal-and-Business-Case-Nov-2022-FINAL-SUBMISSION.pdf>
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- iii <https://www.gov.scot/publications/island-communities-impact-assessments-guidance-toolkit-2/pages/4/>
- iv <https://www.gov.scot/publications/island-communities-impact-assessments-guidance-toolkit-2/pages/2/>