UHI | NORTH, WEST AND HEBRIDES
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Marketing & Communications Strategy 2023 - 2028

Contents

UHI North, West and Hebrides

**Marketing and Communications Strategy**
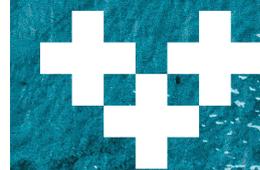
Introduction

UHI North, West and Hebrides is Scotland's newest college, formed in August 2023 following the merger of UHI North Highland, UHI Outer Hebrides and UHI West Highland.

Proudly rooted in the culture and landscapes of the North and West Highlands, Skye and Outer Hebrides, UHI North, West and Hebrides provides relevant and distinctive learning, skills, research and innovation, shaped by the needs and ambitions of our communities, with a reach that extends locally, nationally and internationally.

As one of the largest partners within the University of the Highlands and Islands, we deliver flexible, supportive lifelong learning, from access level to PhD, to suit more people, at more levels, for more reasons.

We serve a diverse population, from school leavers to working adults, from career changers to those entering the workforce.

Through our range of senior phase, further education and higher education courses, world-class research, and flexible place-based, work-based and online study options, we're widening access to education in our rural and island communities, removing barriers to learning, providing relevant progression and career pathways for our students, and creating a personalised experience tailored to their needs.
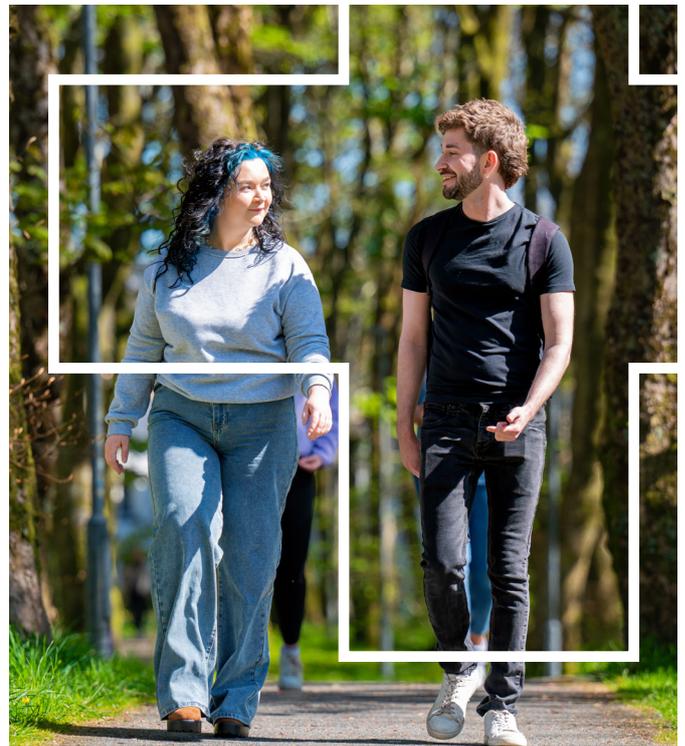
We're delivering learning, skills, research and innovation to support a talent pipeline for the region's key growth sectors including energy, engineering and construction, net zero and sustainability, creative industries, food and drink, health and social care, land and sea-based industries, and Gaelic.

As an anchor institution in the region, our aim is to have a transformative impact on the people, communities and economies of our regions, by providing opportunities that enable people to live, work and study in the North and West Highlands, Skye and Outer Hebrides.

Strategic framework

A three-year strategic framework was set out in our business case for merger.

+ Our vision

To be an anchor institution for the region – a connected, flexible and sustainable learning organisation, opening doors to a world of opportunities.

+ Our mission

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.

+ Our values

+ **Trust:** We take pride in our work and trusted by our students, staff and partners. We are recognised for our leadership and dedication to deliver more for everyone we serve.

+ **Integrity:** We take responsibility for our actions, ensuring transparency and accountability. People are at the heart of everything we do, and we operate in a culture of collaboration, openness, dignity and respect.

+ **Excellence:** We are ambitious for our learners, our staff, our college, and our communities. We drive innovation, aspire to be sector leaders, and measure our success against national and international benchmarks.

+ Our strategic goals

+ To become a financially sustainable joined-up organisation

+ To grow curriculum, particularly into key areas that link with our research and commercial opportunities

+ To grow research and knowledge exchange through connecting our current specialisms and developing them alongside our region's potential

+ To have cohesive and responsive business development teams who can respond effectively and purposefully to opportunities of scale

+ To enhance the student experience through connecting our sites, resources, communities, and multi-location programmes

+ To have resilient team structures and depth of resource to address changing priorities, opportunities, and economic difficulties.

Marketing and Communications Strategy: Introduction

+ Purpose:

The Marketing and Communications Strategy provides clear information to our Board of Management, staff, students, customers and stakeholders on our approach to increasing student enrolments (core funded and non-core funded), enhancing and protecting the reputation of UHI North, West and Hebrides, building and strengthening brand awareness, and engaging internal and external stakeholders to achieve our business goals.

+ Scope:

Marketing and communications are key to delivering the vision, mission and the strategic goals of UHI North, West and Hebrides post-merger.

The strategy provides a framework to support development of an annual marketing and communication operational plan and other relevant action plans, which will contain specific key performance indicator measurements.

We will align our activities with UHI strategic priorities and work closely with colleagues across the UHI partnership, particularly around higher education, rest of UK and international student recruitment, as well as research, knowledge exchange and innovation.

Success of the strategy relies on collaborative working with colleagues across UHI North, West and Hebrides and all staff recognising their role in supporting marketing and communications in its broadest sense. The marketing and communications team can only deliver on this strategy by working in close partnership with the following departments:

- + Curriculum
- + Enterprise and strategic projects
- + Engagement
- + Admissions and registry
- + Student services
- + Leadership and strategy
- + UHI marketing and communications
- + UHI international

+ We have some unique challenges:

+ With 19 campuses and centres across the North and West Highlands, Skye, and Outer Hebrides, UHI North, West and Hebrides covers a geographical area larger than Wales. The region consists of rural and island communities with dispersed populations.

+ Critical enabling infrastructure is fragmented with transport, digital connectivity, rurality, and affordable housing key issues.

+ Retaining and attracting young people to live and work in the region is a challenge due to declining populations and an increasing older demographic.*

+ The Highlands and Islands have a higher employment rate than the rest of Scotland, but face challenges like high seasonal employment, lower skilled employment and wages, and limited access to child, health and social care.**

+ School leavers in the region are much more likely to enter employment and less likely to enter higher education, compared to peers from the rest of Scotland.***

+ We are operating in a competitive student recruitment market, with declining international student numbers, and sector-wide funding cuts.

+ But we also have unique opportunities:

+ The Highlands and Islands have the potential to become a world leader in green energy and net zero. Growth opportunities exist in green energy; the blue and green economy; sustainable construction, food and drink; tourism; space and aerospace; life sciences; and creative industries. We have academic excellence and research/ innovation expertise in these areas.

+ We are highly connected to the needs and ambitions of our communities through our network of 19 campuses and centres, with staff and students contributing significantly to their local communities. Engagement with local and regional business and industry is strong.

+ Our area is known throughout the world for its unique culture and natural beauty, attracting people who want to live, work or study in our communities, especially post Covid. An increasing number of young people are interested in living and working in the Highlands and Islands.****

+ Our expertise in online learning and digital technologies allows us to widen educational access and break down geographical barriers.

+ We offer progression pathways through further and higher education qualifications and into careers, with flexible entry and exit points.

+ Areas of expertise include: adventure studies; archaeology; maritime studies; equine studies; gamekeeping; golf; Gaelic; environment, pollution, environmental science, sustainable development, peatlands; engineering, advanced manufacturing and energy; creative industries; tourism and hospitality; health and social care.

Strategic aims, objectives and outcomes

+ Strategic aim one: To grow the distinctive profile and reputation of UHI North, West and Hebrides

We will raise awareness of our learning offer, academic excellence, industry/business collaborations, research, innovation, and student experience, to a wide range of audiences in a visible, understood, and meaningful way. Staff, students, alumni, and employers are our greatest ambassadors, and we will adopt a storytelling, multi-channel approach to share our key messages, increase awareness amongst key stakeholders, and build meaningful and trusted relationships. We will enable teams with the tools and resources they need to build brand awareness in the community.

We will achieve this by:

+ **Strategic communications** - using clear and consistent communications with internal and external stakeholders, clearly defining key messages based on audience need, our vision, mission, and key strategic goals, with a focus on people, place and impact.

+ **Brand consistency** - Ensuring consistent application of external branding, and supporting external communication campaigns and engagement activities with key stakeholders.

+ **Multi-channel and stakeholder voices** - Using a multi-channel approach and our 'stakeholder voices' to raise brand awareness, with a focus on the student experience, academic and research excellence, flexible modes of delivery, demand-led tertiary offer, progression and career pathways, staff and student achievements, impact, and partnerships.

+ **Internal advocacy** - developing internal brand awareness and a staff voice that is informed, engaged and drives advocacy for the college.

+ **Reputational risk management** - proactively managing reputational risk by identifying, assessing and managing risks that could lead to a crisis.

+ **Gaelic** - Enhancing the use of Gaelic across marketing and communication activity.

Key success criteria:

+ Internal brand awareness campaign.

+ Active staff engagement programme and feedback mechanisms established.

+ Visible signage across all campuses and centres, increased out-of-home and digital advertising.

+ Audience/industry specific marketing materials.

+ Implementation of a customer relationship management (CRM) system.

+ Further development of, and implementation of, an external communication and engagement plan.

+ Implementation of actions, as relevant, contained within the Gaelic Language Plan.
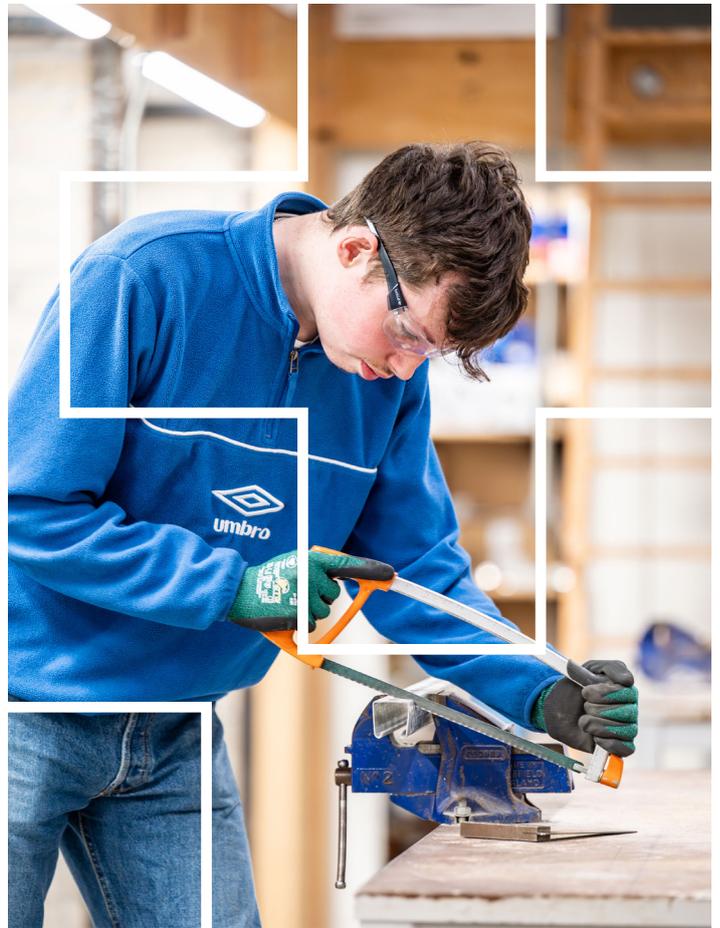
+ Strategic aim two: To drive student recruitment and support enrolment and progression.

We will use data and insights to design targeted student recruitment campaigns, with a focus on audiences, compelling messages, effective delivery, and key curriculum areas. We will focus on various stages of the applicant journey to support our student recruitment goals. We will ensure our marketing channels are fit-for purpose, effective, and accessible. We will enable teams with the tools and resources they need to support student recruitment in the community.

We will achieve this by:

+ **Enhancing internal collaboration** - developing internal awareness of marketing's role in student recruitment, defining our role and the role of others teams to support this effort, focussing on collaboration with colleagues across UHI and UHI North, West and Hebrides to achieve student recruitment goals.

+ **Data-driven campaigns** - using data, insights, and stakeholder feedback to design targeted marketing and communication campaigns.

+ **Multi-channel approach** - using a multi-channel approach and a range of content to raise awareness of our learning offer, flexible modes of delivery and progression/ career pathways.

+ **Streamlined social media** - Consolidating our social media presence to amplify our brand, streamlining communications whilst maintaining community engagement, and focussing on quality over quantity and development of key audiences.

+ **Optimising applicant journey** - focussing on the applicant journey from awareness to interest, consideration, application, decision, and enrolment, to enhance the effectiveness of our marketing and recruitment campaigns and support conversion.

+ **Enabling and empowering colleagues** - enabling and empowering colleagues with the marketing and communication tools, resources, training and support they need to engage effectively with local communities/employers to increase student recruitment.

Key success criteria:

+ Datasets identified and gaps filled.

+ Development of school strategy (with engagement/curriculum).

+ Development of keeping warm applicant communications (with student experience).

+ Development of an internal progression campaign (with student experience/ curriculum).

+ Full implementation of social media strategy/training for teams.

+ Growing digital student ambassador programme.

+ Clearly defined narrative across channels - tertiary offer, mode of delivery, role of campuses and centres, progression and career pathways.

+ Suite of campaign specific marketing toolkits for staff and guides.

+ Strategic aim three:

To raise the profile of research and knowledge exchange, with a focus on institutional development, regional impact and global connections.

We will build strong relationships with research colleagues, leveraging the UHI brand to raise internal and external awareness of our specialisms, the world-class quality of our research and knowledge exchange, and the links between research and curriculum. We will do this by focussing on people, partnerships and impact.

We will achieve this by:

+ **Strengthening research collaboration** – strengthen relationships with research colleagues through the research and knowledge exchange committee and theme leaders.

+ **Communication and marketing plans** - developing targeted marketing and communication plans for research themes, with a focus on real-time data collection, project announcements, published research, and thought-leadership content to position staff as experts.

+ **Leveraging the UHI brand** - collaborating with UHI colleagues to leverage the University of the Highlands and Islands brand, enhancing the authority, credibility and impact of activity.

+ **Internal awareness** - raising internal awareness of research specialisms, staff and impact internally within the college and wider UHI partnership.

+ **Support and training** - Support and train research staff and PhD students to build their external profiles through social media, networks, stakeholder relations, and communications activity.

+ **Impact** - Promoting research and knowledge exchange impact by focusing on storytelling, people, impact and our partnerships with stakeholders.

Key success criteria:

+ Up-to-date website content which includes research highlights, profiles, publications and reports, news and updates, collaborations, contact information, social media integration.

+ Roll out of social media training to enable active research-led social media users.

+ Regular and proactive engagement between marketing and research.

+ Strategic aim four: To support our enterprise, engagement and strategic projects team to grow non-core income.

We will build brand awareness around our strategic projects, focussing on our industry and employer partnerships, and stakeholder voices. We will support teams to grow non-core income through communication and marketing campaigns and toolkits.

We will achieve this by:

+ **Stakeholder engagement** - support key strategic enterprise activity, with a focus on raising awareness of our commercial activities with key stakeholders, brand positioning linked to key sectors, and supporting the enterprise and engagement team with marketing and communication toolkits.

+ **Streamline processes** – review the approval, marketing and application processes for non-core income generating activity to simplify stakeholder interaction.

+ **Optimise digital presence** – provide training and support to optimise digital presence for non-core income across our website and social media platforms.

+ **Strengthen partnerships** - build awareness of our employer and strategic partnerships through marketing and communication activities which amplify the voices of our staff and key strategic stakeholders, employers and industry partners.

+ **Internal advocacy** - promoting enterprise and engagement activity internally to strengthen brand identity.

Key success criteria:

+ Up to date 'for business' website content which includes offer for employers, offer aimed at employees, news and updates, collaboration case studies, contact information.

+ Up to date 'campus/centre' website content which effectively describes the role of our campuses and centres, particularly in more rural locations, and the local offer.

+ Roll out of social media training to enable active enterprise/campus-led social media users.

+ Development a fit-for-purpose customer relationship management system, which supports our stakeholder engagement.

+ Regular and proactive engagement between marketing, enterprise, engagement and strategic projects.

+ Suite of campaign specific marketing toolkits for staff and guides.

+ Strategic aim five: To support development of a strong and positive staff culture.

We will strengthen our internal communications, build two-way engagement and feedback channels, and enable and empower our staff through line managers, to support the development of a strong and positive staff culture, which aids and enhances our brand identity and external reputation.

We will achieve this by:

- **+ Accessible and inclusive communications** - creating accessible communication channels and ensuring a consistent flow of inclusive communications tailored to the needs of staff with clear key messages.

- **+ Two-way engagement and collaboration** – developing spaces for two-way engagement, feedback and collaboration, with a focus on open, transparent and honest communications that build trust, and a staff voice that is active, heard, valued, and acted upon.

- **+ Internal brand awareness** - Building awareness of our strategic objectives, and individual/team achievements to support our long-term goals.

- **+ Enabled communication** – enable line managers as communicators and empower teams to share news and updates.

- **+ Management visibility** - increasing visibility of the senior management team and creating opportunities for all staff to engage with senior managers and build relationships.

Key success criteria:

- **+** Internal brand awareness campaign.

- **+** Teams fully utilising all staff information spaces to share their operational updates/ raise awareness of their own outputs/outcomes.

- **+** Active staff engagement programme and two-way feedback channels.

- **+** Effective team briefing system.

+ Strategic aim six: To create an efficient and effective marketing and communications team across a dispersed area, aligned to make best use of local knowledge, skills and experience.

We will work together to build our team post-merger, ensuring collaboration, support and respect, with a focus on roles, responsibilities, clear goals, training, and effective communication to deliver our strategic aims.

We will achieve this by:

+ Implementation of agreed strategy, policies and procedures, and annual operational plans – helping to establish clear goals, operational priorities and resources required.

+ Define roles and interdependencies - Mapping functions, defining roles, and identifying interdependencies and integration points to ensure accountability and reducing duplication.

+ Identifying skillsets and address skills gaps - identify necessary skillsets, training gaps, and support staff and team development.

+ Establishing key performance indicators – to measure progress and success.

+ Communication and engagement – promote open communication, team building, celebrate achievements, and ensure engagement in wider UHI/College Development Network projects.

Key success criteria:

+ Strategy, policies and procedures complete and implemented

+ Annual operating plan, delivering on priorities and key performance indicators.

+ Supportive team working/collaboration

+ Positive mindset/relationships.

+ High engagement and creativity.

+ Healthy working action plan.

✛ Enabling documents

✛ UHI North, West and Hebrides Strategic Statement

✛ UHI North, West and Hebrides Gaelic Strategy

✛ UHI North, West and Hebrides Gaelic Language Plan

✛ UHI North, West and Hebrides People and Culture Strategy

✛ UHI North, West and Hebrides Tertiary Curriculum Strategy

✛ UHI North, West and Hebrides Income Growth Strategy

✛ UHI North, West and Hebrides Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy

✛ Student Experience Strategy

✛ UHI 2030 Strategic Plan

✛ Islands Strategy 2024-2029

✛ UHI Gaelic Language Plan

✛ Highlands and Islands Regional Tertiary Outcome Agreement

✛ Colleges – Anchor Institutions, Fuelling Scotland's Economic Success

✛ Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework

References:

* Assessing_Future_Population_Related_Challenges_in_the_Highland_Council_Area. pdf (December 2023); rural-and-regional-disadvantage-in-the-highlands-and-islands-executive-summary.pdf (hie.co.uk) (May 2022).

** Highland's employment, unemployment and economic inactivity - ONS (May 2024); rural-and-regional-disadvantage-in-the-highlands-and-islands-executive-summary.pdf (May 2022).

*** Young People Maximising Opportunities (November 2018).

**** More young people want to stay in the Highlands and Islands, says new report | HIE (December 2018).

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