

Lews Castle College (Transfer & Closure) Order 2023

Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA)

November 2023

ISLAND COMMUNITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Name of Policy, Strategy or Service

The Lews Castle College (Transfer & Closure) Order 2023

OBJECTIVES OF POLICY

1. What are the objectives of the policy, strategy or service?

The objective is to merge North Highland College and Lews Castle College by winding up Lews Castle College and transferring its property, rights, liabilities and obligations to North Highland College.

2. What are the intended impacts or outcomes?

The intended outcomes of the merging colleges are to:

- To become a financially sustainable joined up organisation.
- To grow curriculum.
- To grow research and knowledge exchange.
- To respond to opportunities of scale.
- To enhance the student experience.
- To address changing priorities and opportunities and economic difficulties.

3. How do these impacts potentially differ as between mainland and Island communities?

The merging parties have indicated that merger will take consideration of the specific circumstances of the island community.

STAKEHOLDERS & DATA

4. What data is available about the current situation in the islands?

Lews Castle College currently operates 4 centres at : Stornoway, North Uist, Benbecula and Barra. It is also part of a joint venture in South Uist. Ceòlas Uibhist (a Gaelic culture, heritage and arts organisation) and Lews Castle College are partners in Cnoc Soilleir, a centre for Gaelic music, dance and culture.

5. Do you need to consult?

The Scottish Government has consulted on this proposal.

6. Who are your key Stakeholders?

College boards, students, student association, staff and trade unions.

7. How does any existing data differ between islands?

Lews Castle College is by far the smallest of the 3 colleges which are proposing to merge. There are no indications that the data differs between islands in the Outer Hebrides.

8. Are there any existing design features or mitigations in place?

The merging parties have committed to work alongside the Islands Strategy, ensuring outputs from Island Skills Audits are integrated into their new curriculum.

CONSULTATION

9. Is there any information already gathered through previous engagements?

The merging parties carried out an initial consultation in early 2022. This was followed by a 10 week public consultation which ran from 8 August 2022 to 14 October 2022. This consultation consisted of:

- Online information events
- Drop-ins with the merger coordinator across campuses and learning centres
- A survey for staff, students, and the public
- Comment cards on campuses and learning centres
- Staff focus groups
- Let's blether sessions for students
- External stakeholder engagement events and meetings

The Scottish Government has undertaken a 10 week consultation on the proposed merger, which ran from 24 February to 5 May 2023 and generated 21 responses.

10. The views of island communities - Information gathered through consultations

Western Isles

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar referred the Scottish Government to the letter they had submitted to the consultation run by the merging colleges in autumn 2022. The main points in this letter are:

- Requirement to meet educational needs of island communities.
- Importance of an Islands Impact Assessment.
- Posts to be allocated equitably and not centralised.
- Importance of islands having a voice, through local advisory board, at new College Board level.
- Emphasis on Gaelic.
- Equity of provision – via 15-24 Learner Journey & Progression Pathways & Assessment for Prior Learning.
- Importance of local learning centres.

ASSESSMENT

11. Does your assessment identify any unique impacts on island communities?
- Demographic
 - Economic
 - Gaelic
 - Social

Lews Castle College is more remote than the other colleges in the proposed merger, with specific transport challenges which mainland communities, no matter how remote, do not face.

The Outer Hebrides has the highest number of Gaelic speakers in the country.

12. Does your assessment identify any potential barriers or wider impacts?

No

13. Are there mitigations already in place for these impacts raised?

The merging parties have indicated that they have no current plans to close centres where learning is delivered, nor to withdraw any courses from any locations. Therefore students will not have to travel or relocate to access courses, and therefore transport issues will be unaffected.

There is a commitment in the business case of the three colleges', which are the merging parties, to drive forward the availability of Gaelic education across the Outer Hebrides and Skye as well as mainland Highland regions.

There is a published commitment to create Local Advisory Committees, one for each former college area, the relevant one here would be the Outer Hebrides Local Advisory Committee. The chair and vice-chair of each Local Advisory Committee will have seats on the board of the newly merged college.

14. Are there mitigations in place for the impacts identified and noted above from stakeholders and community consultations?

There are commitments from the merging party to take into account any particular requirements of the islands.

15. Does the evidence show different circumstances or different expectations or needs, or different experiences or outcomes as between whom? (such as levels of satisfaction, or different rates of participation)?

No

16. Are these different effects likely?

N/A

17. Are these effects significantly different?

No

18. Could the effect amount to a disadvantage for an island community compared to the mainland or between island groups?

No

19. Identify resources required to improve or mitigate outcomes for island Communities.

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) have advised that they are confident the merger will create significant benefits for students, staff and stakeholders.

The Transition Board established by the merging colleges has indicated that there are currently no plans to close any of the physical centres on the Outer Hebrides and no current plans to move in-person courses to online learning, and currently no plans to relocate any in-person courses.

The Transition Board have also stated that they do not believe that there will be increased movement of students, which will mean there will be no impact on numbers of students using ferries and no impact on numbers of students seeking accommodation, directly as a result of the merger. It is important to note however that if the merged college is successful in attracting additional students that that may well result in additional numbers of students travelling and looking for accommodation.

The business case for the merger makes a commitment to establish three Local Advisory Committees, one for each of the merged colleges. The chair and vice-chair of each of these Local Advisory Committees will be members of the main college board. This will help maintain local connection and input, from the islands, into the college.

There is a commitment in the business case to support the development of Gaelic teacher education and to increase the availability of Gaelic education.

20. Should delivery mechanisms/mitigations vary in different island communities?

No

21. Do you need to return to the consultation participants in respect of mechanisms or mitigations?

No

22. Have island circumstances been factored into the evaluation process?

Yes

23. Have any island-specific indicators/targets been identified that require monitoring?

No

24. How will outcomes be measured on the islands?

The new college will monitor the outcomes and the SFC will expect UHI, as the Regional Strategic Body, to monitor delivery, learner satisfaction and outcomes as part of its funding agreement with the new college.

25. How has the policy, strategy or service affected island communities?

There should be no reduction in educational opportunities and in the longer-term there should be an increase in opportunities.

26. How will lessons learned in this ICIA inform future policy making and service delivery?

N/A

PUBLISHING ICIA

The ICIA will be published in Gaelic on the Scottish Government website

ICIA completed by
Mary Maxwell

Position
Lead Policy Officer

Signature and date

 **12/5/23**

ICIA authorised by
Adam Reid

Position
DD – Skills; Lifelong Learning & Science

Signature and date

 **23/5/23**



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