

Fairer Scotland Duty – assessment template

This Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment template should be used with the [guidance published on the Scottish Government website](#). This gives advice about applying the Duty, links to useful resources and a glossary of key terms.

Title of policy/practice/ strategy/legislation etc.	The Lews Castle College (Transfer & Closure) Order 2023
Lead Minister	Minister for Higher & Further Education
Lead official	Mary Maxwell
Directorate Division team	Directorate for Lifelong Learning & Skills; Young Workforce & SFC Sponsorship Division; College Governance Team

Stage 1 – planning

This is a strategic decision.

Please answer the questions below to help with your planning.

- What is the aim of your policy/strategy/plan?

To close Lews Castle College and merge it into North Highland College.

- Who will it affect (particular groups/businesses/geographies etc)?

Students and staff; Outer Hebridean communities.

- What outcomes do you expect the policy/strategy/plan to deliver?

The colleges who wish to merge aim to create an anchor institution of scale; to become more financially resilient; to increase opportunities for college staff and more resilient services for learners.

- What is your timeframe for completing the Fairer Scotland Duty assessment?

19 May 2023

- Who else will be involved in the assessment and what roles will they play?

Data received from Advanced Learning & Skills Analysis (ALSA) team.

Review by policy colleagues and SGLD colleague.

Stage 2 – evidence

Please answer the questions below to meet the Duty's evidence requirements.

- what does the evidence suggest about existing inequalities of outcome, caused by socio-economic disadvantage, in this specific policy area? You might want to think about:
 - people on low incomes
 - people in deprived areas (and particular communities of place and interest)
 - people with no/low wealth or in debt
 - people in material deprivation
 - people from different social classes

The population of the Outer Hebrides is scattered over a large geographic area, dependent upon ferry transportation to travel between the islands which are not connected by causeway; and to the mainland. The 4 centres which Lews Castle College provides are situated from Barra in the south of the Outer Hebrides to Lewis in the north.

The students at Lews Castle College, mostly fall into the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) Quintile(Q) 3, with around 65% falling into that quintile. Around 1% of the students studying are from Q1 (the most deprived) but the bottom 2 quintiles (1 and 2) account for 20% of the students studying at the college.

SIMD divides Scotland into small geographic areas and measures the relative deprivation of each of these geographic areas. The measures are: income levels; employment levels; educational attainment; health; access to services; crime levels and housing quality (overcrowding and central heating).¹ It is important to note that not everyone in a particular SIMD area will be deprived or affluent, it is only an area-based measure.

- what does the evidence suggest about possible impacts of the policy/programme/decision, as planned, on those inequalities of outcome?

¹ N.B. It is important to note that SIMD must be used with caution in rural areas, as it is a measure for identifying concentrated areas of deprivation and the scattered population of rural areas makes it a less effective tool than when used in urban areas.

The merging colleges have indicated that they have no current plans to close any physical centres, withdraw any courses or make any courses online which are presently presented in person. Given that there should be no change in provision of course availability there should be no reduction in access to education for students in the area served by Lews Castle College. The merging colleges have publicly committed to no compulsory redundancies because of the merging process.

- is there evidence that suggests alternative approaches to the policy/programme/decision? For example, evidence from the UK or international evidence?
No
- what gaps are there in key evidence? Is it possible to collect new evidence quickly in other areas? For example, through consultation meetings, focus groups or surveys?
There are no gaps in key evidence.
- how could you involve communities of interest (including those with lived experience of poverty and disadvantage) in this process? The voices of people and communities are likely to be important for identifying potential improvements to the programme/policy/decision.

The Scottish Government has conducted a 10 week public consultation into the merger proposal. This follows two consultations by the merging colleges.

Stage 3 – assessment and improvement

The key questions to answer at this stage are:

- what options could strengthen this programme/policy/decision in its impact on inequalities of outcome?

The stated aims by the merging parties to grow the curriculum and to enhance the student experience, if achieved, will improve the available learning and qualification options for students in this remote area, and enhance skills provision by developing stronger links with employers. There is also a commitment to ensure equality of resources across the partner areas for staff, students and communities and a commitment to ensure all posts remain spread across the region without a centralising drift.

- What are the pros and cons of these options?

The expansion of the curriculum would improve choice for students in the Outer Hebrides.

- how could the programme/policy/decision be adjusted to address inequalities associated with particular groups? Communities of interest or of place who are more at risk of inequalities of the outcome?

N/A

Stage 4 – decision

The decision stage allows deputy directors (or above) to consider the assessment process from stages 2 and 3. They can also agree changes to the policy, proposal or decision and confirm that due regard to meeting the Fairer Scotland Duty has been achieved.

Key questions to discuss at this summary stage are:

- what changes, if any, will be made to the proposal as a result of the assessment? Why are these changes being made and what are the expected outcomes?
- if no changes are proposed, please explain why.

No changes are proposed as the merging parties have already made commitments to the students, staff and communities of the area served by Lews Castle College which, if met, will ensure that there will be no increase in inequality and, if the merger fulfils its promise, may very well provide a reduction in inequality.

[Merger proposal and business case \(uhi.ac.uk\)](http://uhi.ac.uk) (page references below)

- A co-ordinated, joined up and reliable regional curriculum providing clear progression and articulation pathways to employment or further study (p 29)
- The dissemination and embedding of good practice in learning and teaching across the region to ensure consistency in service, student experience and equitable opportunity (p29)
- No compulsory redundancies (p75)
- Increased personal and professional development opportunities, including job progression, secondment, special projects, research and scholarly activity (p30)
- A range of Gaelic courses from community-based beginners' courses through to General Teaching Council for Scotland approved Gaelic medium initial Teacher Education programmes.(p31)
- The development of a new and innovative business development strategy bringing the external business environment together in a more progressive and proactive way. (p30)

Once these questions have been discussed and written up, save this document in the relevant project file in eRDM. Your deputy director (or above) should sign and date in the box below.

**Sign off of the Fairer
Scotland Assessment
template**



23/5/23

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STAGE 5 - PUBLICATION

The final stage is the [Fairer Scotland Duty summary](#) for publication on the Scottish Government website.