

Agenda Item	6.
Report No	EDU/2/22

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Education

Date: 24 February 2022

Report Title: Update on the Highland Virtual Academy

Report By: Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an update on progress with the Highland Virtual Academy (HVA) since the last report to Committee on 20 May 2021.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are invited to:

- (i) note the progress made with regards attainment and achievement in the Highland Virtual Academy; and the plans for continuing to support Highland Schools through the HVA.

3. Implications

3.1 **Resource** -The current core staffing of the HVA consists of the 1FTE Head Teacher, along with 8.8FTE teaching resource. 2.8FTE are allocated to the Senior Phase teaching, 1.0FTE to Gaelic, and 5.0FTE to Interrupted Learners.

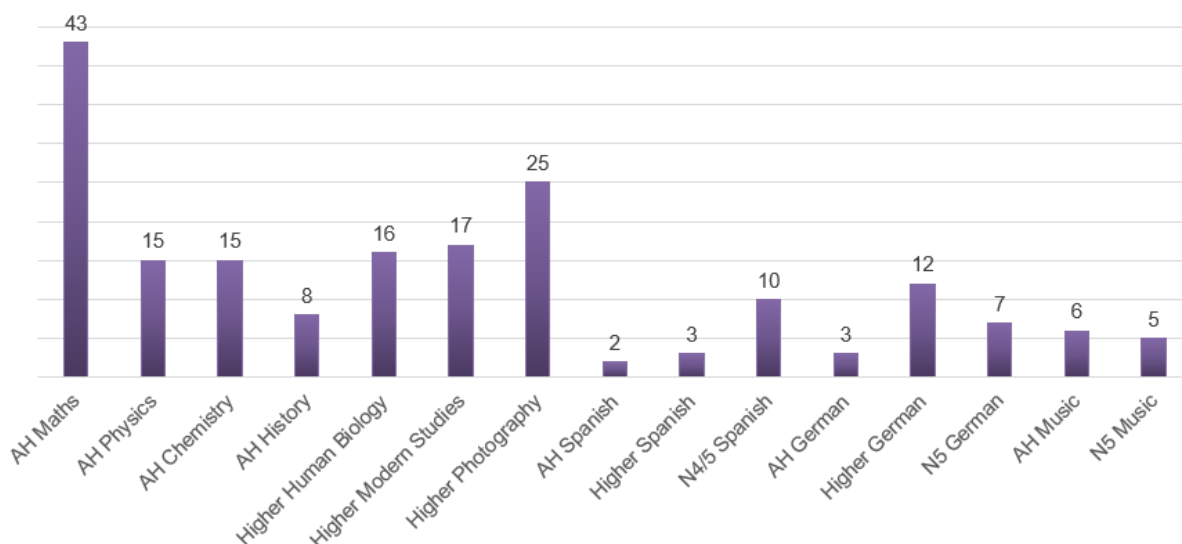
3.2 **Legal** - Amongst other duties, education authorities are required to secure adequate and efficient provision of school education, and to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of school education in schools that are managed by them. They must also make adequate and efficient provision for the additional support required for each child or young person with additional support needs for whose school education they are responsible, and to keep under consideration the additional support needs identified and the adequacy of support provided. Lastly, there are legislative provisions relating to Gaelic Education. These include placing a duty on education authorities to promote and support Gaelic Medium Education (GME) and Gaelic Learner Education (GLE).

- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)** - THC's digital learning provision, including the HVA, expands opportunities for young people and helps mitigate the impacts of location, vulnerability and rurality in Highland in terms of equitable access.
- 3.4 **Climate Change/Carbon Clever** - There may be some marginal benefits from the delivery of education using technology, as opposed to teaching staff travelling between schools and therefore reducing the footprint.
- 3.5 **Risk** - Without support for interrupted learners there is a risk that a number of young people would lose out on educational provision and outcomes.
- 3.6 **Gaelic** - the HVA expands Gaelic learning opportunities and, as mentioned at 3.3 above, mitigates the impacts of location and rurality.

4. Overview

- 4.1 The Highland Virtual Academy has now been running for 6 years. Originally it was introduced to support equity of curriculum opportunities for pupils across the Highlands. Working in partnership with schools, the HVA and base school have key responsibilities to support pupils.
- 4.2 The HVA provides opportunities for young people of secondary school age to access areas of the curriculum regardless of their geographic location or difficulties engaging with learning in school. Learning & teaching is delivered by real teachers in real time through active and collaborative experiences. The HVA Head Teacher focuses on quality improvement activities on an ongoing basis such as teacher observations and pupil focus groups, this gives valid feedback and next steps.
- 4.3 **Senior Phase 21/22 (S4-S6)**
 At the time of writing the following courses are offered. Courses are dependent on demand and offered after consultation with Head Teachers. 187 pupils from 27 secondary schools are undertaking senior phases through the HVA an increase of 145 pupils since 2017/2018. Most courses run at capacity with the highest demand for Maths, Sciences and Photography.
 The tables below provide more details

AH Maths	0.2FTE plus 0.2FTE support from IL team	43 pupils
AH Physics	0.2FTE	15 pupils
AH Chemistry	0.2FTE	15 pupils
AH History	0.2FTE	8 pupils
Higher Human Biology	0.2FTE	16 pupils
Higher Modern Studies	0.2FTE	17 pupils
Higher Photography	0.2FTE	25 pupils
AH Spanish Higher Spanish N4/N5 Spanish	0.4FTE	2 pupils 3 pupils 10 pupils
AH German Higher German N5 German	0.6FTE (permanent member of staff)	3 pupils 12 pupils 7 pupils
AH Music N5 Music	0.3FTE	6 pupils 5 pupils



4.4 Results Analysis 2020/21

The table below has an analysis of 2020/21 results from HVA pupils.

A-D pass rate is high, and an above average number of pupils achieve upper grades (A/B's).

Course	No of Pupils	Grade A	Grade B	Grade C	Grade D	Fail	A-D Pass Rate
AH Maths	28	11	8	4	3	2	93%
AH Maths for Mechanics	3	2	0	0	1	0	100%
AH Physics	11	7	2	1	1	0	100%
AH Chemistry	15	2	6	3	2	2	87%
AH History	6	4	2	0	0	0	100%
H Human Biology	12	1	1	6	4	0	100%
H Photography	19	7	5	4	1	2	89%
H Spanish	6	3	1	0	1	1	89%
N5 Spanish	4	1	1	0	1	1	75%
AH German	5	2	2	1	0	0	100%
H German	7	6	1	0	0	0	100%
N5 German	3	2	1	0	0	0	100%
AH Music	16	6	1	0	0	1	94%

*Final grade not known for 8 pupils as practical element was completed in base school but based on other component marks their grades will be A/Bs.

Formal Monitoring and Tracking is in place throughout the year, and there is regular communication and discussion between the HVA and the base school throughout the year for pupils who are not on track or who have issues such as poor attendance and not completing work. Support measures and interventions are put in place, and Units are banked as a safety net, to ensure pupils do not leave without any qualifications.

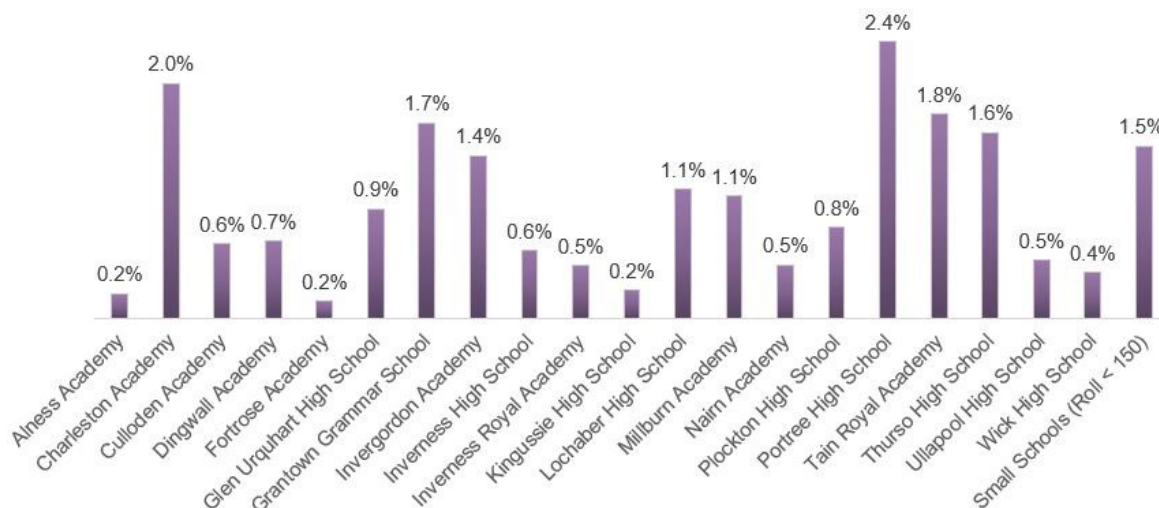
4.5 Interrupted Learners

There is a full-time secondary team dedicated to supporting non-attenders and pupils with interrupted learning. The main aims are (i) to support pupils and give them the skills and confidence to enable them to return to school – most but not all pupils in this category are in BGE – and (ii) to support 'at-risk' pupils to achieve qualifications, ensuring that they don't leave school with zero tariff points. These are likely to be senior phase pupils.

Building on the experience offering online support to children and young people affected by Covid-19, the Highland Virtual Academy will further develop the successful model that was implemented in 2020-2021. In consultation with the base school, pupils and parents/carers, a support package can be agreed and implemented.

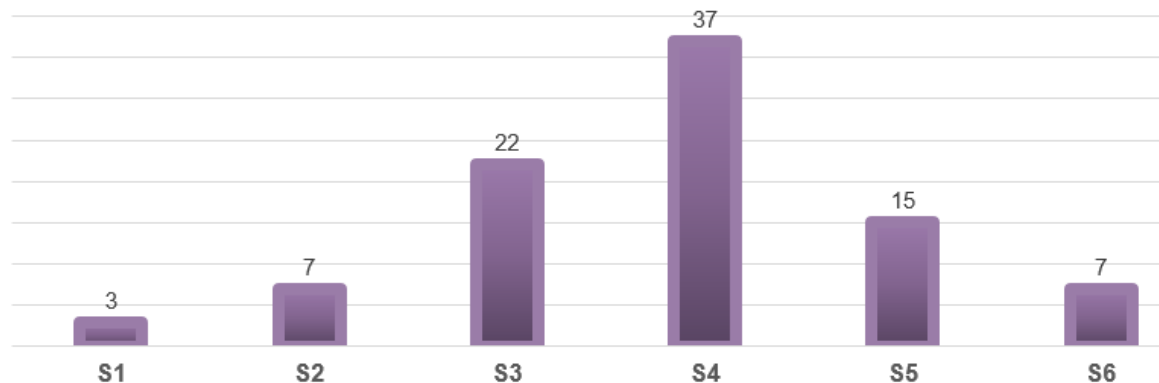
In general, pupils are started on a 1:1 support to build relationships with teachers. The next stage will be to bring small groups of pupils together to enable collaborative learning and further build confidence and skills.

4.6 Referrals for Interrupted Learning support are shown below as a percentage of school roll.



Interrupted learners have been referred from all secondary year groups but 41% of all referrals are for S4 pupils. The focus is on young people who are at risk of leaving with no qualifications and where schools have exhausted their options of support.

Number of interrupted learners being currently supported by year group



Support to interrupted learners is provided through virtual meetings and work set in a Google Classroom environment. The HVA teaching team have experience in

managing barriers to virtual learning and have successfully employed strategies to overcome these. Differentiated support includes camera on/off, chatbox and at times parents will sit on camera to support their child.

With regard to part time timetables currently 12 young people are able to gain the skills and qualifications necessary to enable transition to a positive destination through partnership working between HVA, base school and college. This personalized timetable best meets the needs of the young people and will enable them to succeed.

In some areas, a blended approach of virtual and face-to-face learning may be possible. All young people receive a degree of mentoring support.

Within this group of young people, support is currently being provided at the **Senior Phase** as below.

N4 Literacy	4	N4 Numeracy	5
N4 English	16	N4 Applications of Maths	12
N5 English	28	N4 Maths	10
H English	4	N5 Applications of Maths	7
		N5 Maths	12

Within **BGE**, current numbers receiving support are:

S1 Maths	2	S1 English	2
S2 Maths	5	S2 English	2
S3 Maths	16	S3 English	16

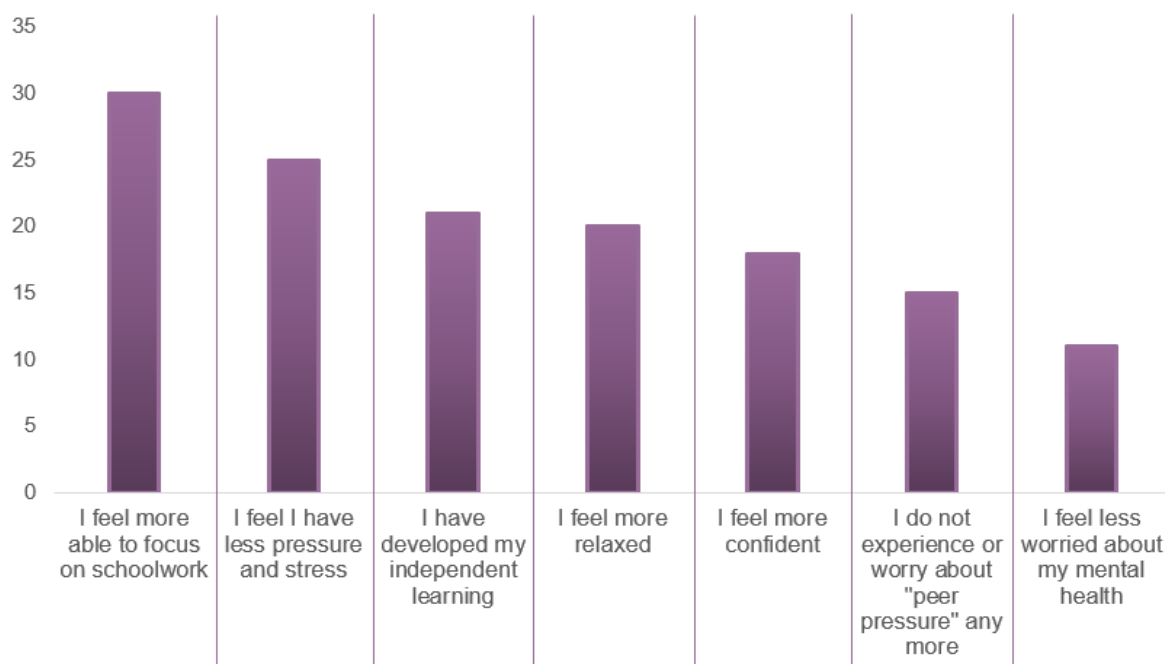
Other courses are supported as capacity allows. See [Appendix 1](#).

- 4.7 In December 2021, young people supported by the HVA were invited to participate in a Learning and Teaching/Health and Wellbeing feedback survey. 42% of the young people who responded said they were unable to carry on with their learning at home before they received support from the HVA Interrupted Learning team, and 94% said they receive high quality learning experiences all or most of the time. Whilst we have not yet formally surveyed parents, many positive comments have been submitted spontaneously by the parents of the young people attending the HVA.

80% of supported pupils find the work engaging and interesting all or most of the time, and 96% said the work they are set provides them with the right amount of challenge.

78% of young people report feeling supported and encouraged by the HVA Interrupted Learning teaching team throughout, with a further 12% feeling supported and encouraged most of the time.

The key messages from feedback for HVA Interrupted Learning support are shown below.



4.8 Care Experienced Young People (CEYP)

The term “care experienced” refers to anyone who is or has been in care or is from a Looked After background, at any stage in life. In Highland, Looked After Children (LAC) under attain compared to our Virtual comparator. As at the time of writing, Highland has 23 LAC in the nursery setting, 121 in primary school, and 141 in secondary school. The Head Teacher of the HVA is leading on improving outcomes for LAC and will expand this to include CEYP.

All secondary Looked After Children are tracked each term for attendance, exclusions, timetable and curriculum, and attainment and progression. The Head Teacher of the HVA meets with DHT/HT of each LAC pupil’s school to discuss progress and interventions and/or support that may be required. Similar tracking and support systems are being developed for LAC in the primary and nursery settings, as is a multi-agency support/action plan meeting for LAC pupils identified as at risk if leaving with no qualifications. The authority is also developing a comprehensive database for CEYP. It will include details of every pupil who has been or is currently in care or from a looked-after background at any stage in their life, no matter how short, including adopted children who were previously looked-after. In the long-term, we aim to use this to ensure cohesive working between agencies to support LAC and CEYP and achieve improvements to attainment and positive destinations. This is a good opportunity to support different learning styles as well as provide support for wellbeing.

4.9 Gaelic

A pilot is underway with the Highland Virtual Academy to support Gaelic in the BGE. Gaelic is now delivered via online teaching to 2 x S1 classes and 2 x S2 classes in Kinlochleven High School for Gaelic learners. A weekly lesson for each class is being delivered online using Google Classrooms and all work is completed through GSuite.

4.10 Currently there are 25 pupils in S1 and 28 pupils in S2 receiving GLE. This development contributes directly to the Highland Council Gaelic Language Plan 3 - commitment to ‘a systematic and sustainable approach to increase the percentage of Gaelic Learners in establishments.’ Possible expansion with GLE delivery within other schools will be discussed.

- 4.11 Feedback from pupils (via the school's Pupil Voice process) and from parents has been very positive, with S2 pupils reporting that the availability of a subject specialist through the HVA has greatly improved the provision of Gaelic in the school.
- 4.12 Online GME support is currently being piloted with a primary GME setting, due to a staffing shortage. This support will be a mix of live online sessions and pre-recorded videos delivering learning to pupils. This blended learning delivery will follow best practice pedagogy recommended by the Highland Council Digital Engagement Team.
- 4.13 Examples of current development work in other areas are as follows:
- Online GME support is being piloted with a primary GME setting during the current term, due to a staffing shortage. This support is a mix of live online sessions and pre-recorded videos delivering learning to pupils. This blended learning delivery will follow best practice pedagogy recommended by the Highland Council Digital Engagement Team.
 - A Gaelic Content Creating School scheme (SNGG - Sgoil nan Goireasan Gàidhlig) has been set up, to encourage colleagues to share resources with others.
 - A variety of ThingLinks have been created for various curricular topics. This is an online resource that contains direct links (buttons) to various resources; specialist topic websites, YouTube videos, teaching videos and downloadable activity tasks that teachers can then use to support their teaching. Some of the SNGG content is also shared on these ThingLinks as well as through the Digital Hub. These resources are responsive to specific requirements throughout the year and are a useful tool to gather information in one place.
 - A further development is underway, where Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Port Rìgh and Bun-sgoil Ulapul are taking part in shared learning as online lessons are delivered as a joint project, with teachers taking turns in delivering teaching online to pupils from both settings and reconvening to discuss progress and plan next steps. This project could become a model for further development in other schools.

5. Next Steps/ Key miles

- 5.1 The Education Service will continue to offer Senior Phase options via the HVA and will develop the newly introduced programmes for Gàidhlig Medium education, Care Experienced Young People, and support for Interrupted Learners. The HVA will continue to provide mentor support and will link in with the new "Ambitious Highland" programme to support enhanced transition aimed at improving positive and sustained destinations for school leavers and will expand its own Wider Achievement programme. We will devise a questionnaire to obtain parental as well as pupil feedback.

Within the National e-learning offer, i-Sgoil is the support for interrupted learners and is the pilot for the Northern Alliance. Details of the subjects and levels offered as part of i-sgoil is shown at Appendix 1 below. The comparative information for the HVA is also shown and demonstrates that the HVA offers a significantly wider choice of subjects than does the e-sgoil. The directorate working alongside the Head Teacher of the HVA will continue to investigate implementing a broader range of courses that will further support the needs of the young people, including partnership work in the future with key stakeholders to develop wider achievement, skills and accreditation. It

is our intention to provide all of our young people with a positive and sustained destination.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning

Date: 22 January 2022

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APPENDIX 1:

Courses supported by HVA

S1 & S2 *provision offered and running as capacity allows*

- English / Literacy
- Maths / Numeracy
- IDL
- PSE & Pastoral Support

S3 BGE *provision offered and running as capacity allows*

- English
- Maths
- French
- German
- History
- Business Admin & IT
- Geography
- Modern Studies
- Travel & Tourism
- Economics
- Personal Development Award
- PSE & Pastoral Support

S4, S5 & S6

- English & Maths (at the levels above)
- French (N4, N5)
- History (N4, N5 & Higher)
- Business Management (N4, N5)
- Admin & IT (N4 Units)
- Geography (N4, N5)
- Modern Studies (N4, N5)
- Travel & Tourism (N5)
- PSE & Pastoral Support

Courses offered at i-sgoil

- Support interrupted learners for primary pupils, secondary BGE and secondary senior phase
- Staffing is 6.7FTE plus a DHT
- Less than 10 primary pupils
- Approximately 20 pupils in BGE
- Approximately 20 pupils in senior phase

Course support is

- English at H and N4/N5
- Maths at N4
- Applications of Maths at N5

Unit support is

- Mental health and wellbeing at level 5
- Enterprise and employability at level 5
- Digital passport
- PDA

BGE provision

- broad range of subject areas grouped under themes such as STEAM, Global Citizenship