



Building our communities

Education on the Islands... highlights of 2018

By Katie Macleod

For education in the Western Isles, 2018 was a year of change, growth, and plenty of success, whether it was the increased apprenticeship opportunities for school leavers, or the artistic achievements of young people performing at the commemorative Dileab concerts

Here, EVENTS looks back at the last 12 months in local education, taking in policy changes, curriculum developments, and the hard work of young people and teachers throughout the islands.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

In the first half of the year, the team structure of Community Learning and Development (CLD) changed in order to implement what's known as Community Capacity Building.

"It's the notion of communities taking more to do with their own future," explained Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Community Learning and Development Manager, Fiona Macinnes-Begg, in March. "It's about helping communities identify and gain the skills to make the changes they need within their communities."

As a result, the CLD team altered its structure so that CLD Officers were based in various Council Ward areas in the islands, instead of solely in Stornoway, allowing them to "forge positive and productive relationships within their communities." This can take a variety of forms, including anything from assisting youth clubs with funding applications, or helping out on the rota at the local parent and toddler group, to organising adult learning opportunities. "For communities to thrive, the people in them need to be a part of the decision-making associated with their community," said Fiona.

Increasing support and outreach into communities also came in the form of the beginnings of the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) services, an expansion being implemented on a national scale by the Scottish Government in the run up to 2020.

This ELC expansion plan will see the government almost double the amount of free nursery time provided in Early Learning for all eligible two, three, and four-year-olds, in an attempt to provide greater choice and flexibility for families, and close the poverty-related attainment gap.

"The main principles of the expansion are that we will provide 1140 hours per year of high quality ELC provision for every child, and that our service will have flexibility to support parents and carers who work or are studying; that there will be sufficient provision conveniently located geographically; and that the costs to parents of using ELC will be more affordable," said Becky Maclean, the Comhairle's Early Years Service Manager, in July.

While a trial run was launched in Tarbert in 2017, extended service options were offered in two term-time nurseries, Shawbost and Tong, in the first half of 2018. "Once expansion is complete, we will see all nurseries opening for at least six hours per day, and in consultation with parents, we will be setting the nursery opening hours which suit their needs," explained Becky.

2018 also saw the further development of the Outer Hebrides Early Intervention Partnership (OHEIP), formerly the Children's Services Partnership Group. The working group consists of representatives from the Comhairle (including ELR, Early Years Services, Children and Families, and Senior Education Officers), as well as external groups Action for Children, Western Isles Foyer, and Harmeny (sic) Education Trust.

In late 2018, OHEIP altered its focus to concentrate on younger children, supporting disadvantaged children and their families from pre-conception through pregnancy, birth, and up to age 12. "In line with the needs of the Comhairle and other organisations, it makes sense to try and work with young people as early as possible, and make the most significant change we can," said Graeme Miller, the Comhairle's Children's Services Manager, in November.

The Comhairle's Education and Children's Services Department

continued its work with other key partners at the annual Partnership Event held at the Caberfeidh Hotel in November. Organized annually by Opportunities for All Coordinator, Sarah Campbell, the event is geared towards bringing key partners who work with the department together, giving them the opportunity to share ideas and best practice, as well as to network.

The keynote speech was delivered by Polar explorer Craig Mathieson, and workshops attended by 200 delegates from across the Western Isles were held by organisations such as Lews Castle College UHI, The Nicolson Institute, Community Learning and Development, and Police Scotland. 2018 marked the eighth year of the event, and Sarah noted that "as the years have progressed the delegate list has expanded, and the type of partners we work with has grown."

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Another major focus of the Education and Children's Services Department in 2018 was on Developing the Young Workforce (DYW), a government initiative which aims to better prepare children and young people aged 3-18 for the world of work.

Locally, the aim has been to increase the availability of work-based learning in schools, and expand the number of apprenticeships on offer, building on data that predicts where jobs will be in the islands' economy in the coming years. "It's a national initiative, but there's a lot going on locally," said Donald Macleod, Senior Education Officer in September, adding that the work begins in nursery and progresses through primary into secondary school.

"It's getting children thinking earlier about what careers they want to pursue, and the reason it's skills-based as an approach is that the careers they might go into may not even exist yet. It's more about giving them a whole suite of skills so they can be more equipped for all sorts of professions in the future."

At primary level, DYW projects are part of everyday education: in Laxdale Primary School, for example, speakers from various organisations visit the school, and pupils visit workplaces that relate to a topic they're already learning about. "Visiting workplaces allows



Eilidh Jayne Macleod, Education Attainment Apprentice at Laxdale Primary School

the children to see jobs in real life, jobs in action, rather than just hearing about them, and we try to get all the classes doing that throughout the year," explained Principal Teacher Mairi Macleod, adding that "we're giving them different experiences and exposing them to different jobs in the local community." For early years pupils, that might look like visits from people in professions they'll already be aware of, such as medicine and the emergency services, while older pupils will focus more on specific skills in certain roles.

As pupils move into secondary school, they have options to study for vocational qualifications and 2018 saw the introduction of Foundation Apprenticeships into the Senior Phase (S5 and S6) for the first time. Taught at SCQF Level 6, which is equivalent to Higher, Foundation Apprenticeships offer school pupils a practical taste of the world of work and an industry-recognised qualification. Seven Foundation Apprenticeships were offered as subject choices in the spring, throughout the four secondary schools thanks to e-Sgoil, the Comhairle's digital learning service.

Apprenticeships are also available for young people when they leave school, and even for older students, or those returning home to the islands after time away.

Launched in 2017, the Comhairle's apprenticeship programme is run by Apprenticeship Manager Dolina Smith, and it was expanded further in 2018. The programme offers a mix of Modern Apprenticeships, which are funded by Skills Development Scotland (SDS), and Comhairle-funded apprenticeships run independently from SDS. Some are posts within the Comhairle, while others are in the private sector.

Within the Comhairle's apprenticeship scheme, Pupil Equity Funding was used last year to fund more apprenticeship posts, specifically for Education Attainment and Gaelic Language Assistant Apprentices. The Pupil Equity Fund is part of a national strategy which requires each local authority to implement measures which will address the attainment gap; money from the Fund is then allocated directly to schools, and can be spent at the discretion of Head Teachers working in partnership with their local authority. In the Western Isles, 22 schools pooled their funding to recruit 12 apprentices who are working to help pupils improve attainment, and six to support the acquisition of Gaelic language skills.

2018 also saw multiple recruitment drives for apprenticeships in areas including Business and Administration, Engineering, Heritage, Harris Tweed, and even at the Isle of Harris Distillery. "It's all about progression," said Dolina in June of the work being done to increase local employment opportunities. "We're trying to change what we deliver to meet future skills needs. With e-Sgoil and distance learning, our locality is no longer a disadvantage. It's allowed us to think outside the box and meet skills needs not just in the Western Isles, but in the whole of Scotland."



Jonathan Fairgreave, Business and Administration Apprentice at Hebridean Housing Partnership



Fiona Nicholson, Education Attainment Apprentice at Castletay Community School and Eoligarry Primary School



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

NEW ACHIEVEMENTS

The achievements of the Western Isles young people are always at the forefront, but were even more so in 2018, with the entire year being designated Scotland's "Year of Young People," or "YOYP."



The Sgoil Lionacleit Pipe Band Getting ready to march in the Tartan Day Parade



Sgoil Lionacleit Pipe Band with KT Tunstall

The national themed year aimed to inspire the country through its young people's ideas, attitudes, and ambitions, and in the Western Isles, there was plenty to inspire. In April, the Sgoil Lionacleit Pipe Band travelled to New York City as official Outer Hebrides Cultural Youth Ambassadors to perform in the annual Tartan Day Parade, thanks to a successful crowdfunding campaign and a £10,000 donation from the Comhairle's Education and Children's Services, while in June, young people across the islands took part in the local Mod competitions.

Later in the summer, the Western Isles Island Games Association games saw secondary pupils from across the islands travel to compete in Stornoway, while an inter-generational summer tea party was hosted by S2 pupils in Lews Castle for residents of local care homes. In November, as part of a dedicated YOYP event, ten young people from the Western Isles attended a 'Spirit of Young People' reception at Holyrood on St Andrews Day with fellow school pupils from Orkney and Shetland, before celebrating at the Young Scot Awards in Glasgow. Another cohort of island youngsters travelled to Glasgow in December to attend the Voices: YOYP 2018 event, where First Minister Nicola Sturgeon celebrated the achievements of Scotland's young people.

Also marketed under the YOYP banner was Dìleab, an intergenerational bilingual project that explored the legacy of four major social influences on the Outer Hebrides over the last century – emigration, wartime experiences, protest and politics, and the lolaire disaster – and brought in participants that included school pupils as well as local musicians.

Dìleab aims to bring local history to life for school pupils and the community alike, showcasing the islands' cultural history and the current talents of the Outer Hebrides, through school projects, storytelling series, and even documentaries. As Evelyn Coull MacLeod, Multimedia Unit Manager at the Comhairle who was overseeing the project, said in June, Dìleab "is about everybody in the community coming together."

The islands-wide project culminated in a hugely successful series of concerts throughout the isles in November and December, with the final concert taking place on 14th December at the Lewis Sports Centre. Pupils performed Innse Gall, the new Outer Hebrides Schools' Anthem, written by local singer-songwriter Willie Campbell, as well as variety of songs, drama, and dance pieces related to the lolaire.

The pupils from multiple island schools received a standing ovation from the audience, and while other Dìleab projects will continue into 2019, the concerts marked a fitting end to the 2018 school year.