



Schools for Higher Education Programme

ASPIRENorth Annual Report 2021/2022

Programme Managers:

Anne Haggart (Grampian)
a.haggart@abdn.ac.uk

Elsbeth Neil (Highlands and Islands)
Elsbeth.neil@abdn.ac.uk

Host Institution:

University of Aberdeen

Programme Management Group Chair:

Kitty Chilcott
Kitty.chilcott@open.ac.uk

Foreword and Report Summary

This report relates to the work of the ASPIRENorth Schools for Higher Education Programme delivered to schools across the North of Scotland for the academic year 2021/2022.

Due to the large geographic area involved, the Programme is co-ordinated from two different bases; one within the University of Aberdeen and the other within UHI's Centre for Health Science in Inverness.

The report covers the end of the very difficult period enforced on everyone because of the Covid-19 pandemic impact.

Contact with pupils was still taking place with safeguarding measures for each Local Authority being considered and adhered to, including mask wearing.

93% of our schools exceeded the 22% HE progression rate for their cohort, with 9 of our schools exceeding 50% HE progression for the cohort.

The overall 5 year average progression rate amongst the schools is 30.8%, a considerable increase from the baseline of 18.3% used with the original allocation of schools.

During this reporting year we engaged with 1171 core cohort pupils from 16 schools with all receiving multiple interventions throughout the year. We carried out **996** Action Planning and pre application interviews with our cohorts.

It should also be noted that pupils who have not entered HE have mainly gained positive destinations in Further Education, Employment and Modern Apprenticeships (See page 12 for full destination information).

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted on young people in ways we did not anticipate. We have found that the staying on rate of S4 cohort pupils in some of our schools has dipped from previous years as pupils opt to leave school for other opportunities. We also see a greater number than previous years of our leavers opting for opportunities in employment or Modern Apprenticeships. This could be due to the economic climate following the Covid 19 pandemic or the increased drive of Developing the Young Workforce and its presence in all our schools.

Our staff have also noticed that the young people we are working with are less confident about moving away from home and some show anxiety in new situations due to the isolation they faced during the Covid 19 pandemic. This was the case, in particular, for young people in the more rural communities.

Aims & Objectives

The programme aims to increase progression to Higher Education of young people in secondary state schools who, due to socio-economic or personal circumstances, face barriers to learning.

To programme targets support on those pupils who:

- **have potential to achieve HE entry, but are at risk of not achieving this potential;**
or
- **are achieving but do not recognise their potential for progression to Higher Education**

ASPIRENorth delivers the Schools for Higher Education Programme in the North of Scotland.

The geographical area covered by the ASPIRENorth Schools for Higher Education Programme is very large and very diverse, covering main centres such as Aberdeen and Inverness, rural towns and remote rural areas. To effectively cover this large geographical area, the programme splits its activity over two offices, with a team in Aberdeen, covering the North East of Scotland, and another in Inverness, covering the Highlands and Islands.

The overall ASPIRENorth Schools for Higher Education Programme aims are to:

- raise awareness, aspirations and expectations of Higher Education in target schools, with selected cohorts of pupils.
- acknowledge and reflect best widening participation practice across Scotland.
- work to promote positive attitudes to learning and improve the skills, knowledge, and confidence of the young people the programme works with
- work to build strong relationships with all partners and in developing activities also be mindful of the need both to enhance what already exists and look towards longer-term embedding and sustainability.
- monitor progression to Higher Education within the target schools, take cognisance of the sector-wide targets, and engage with regional partners as appropriate to contribute to the achievement of these.
- monitor and evaluate programmes and activities to provide meaningful evidence of their quality and effectiveness in relation to the strategic aims of the programme.

Selected cohorts of 15 - 30 pupils from each year group (S3 to S6) participate in each school.

The pupils have been selected because they have the potential to achieve Higher Education entry, but are at risk of not achieving this potential, or who are achieving but do not recognise their potential for progression to Higher Education.

The ASPIRENorth programme, involving relationship development, and a continuum of personal development activities provides targeted and sustained support to pupils to help them achieve progression to Higher Education (in college or university).

This programme includes:

- one-to-one action planning for pupils
- campus visits and taster days
- graduate workplace links
- residential events
- preparation for application to Higher Education
- interview preparation
- development of study skills
- preparation for student life

Impact Made in this Reporting Year

Despite the challenges of safeguarding measures still being in place in schools at the start of the 2021/22 academic year our staff were able to deliver much of the programme without too much adaptation.

From the table below detailing both the HE progression rates of the school and those of the specific cohorts we worked with 13 of our 14 schools with S5/S6 leaver cohorts has exceeded the 22% HE progression rate for their cohort. This is the marker set by the SFC.

School	Progression rates to HE: ASPIRENorth Schools 2021/22 in %	Progression rates to HE: ASPIRENorth Cohort 2021/22 in %
<i>Aberdeen City</i>		
Harlaw Academy	46	N/A
Hazlehead Academy	46	80
Lochside Academy	22	60
Northfield Academy	6	24
St Machar Academy	29	78
<i>Aberdeenshire</i>		
Fraserburgh Academy	27	23
Peterhead Academy	29	9
The Gordon Schools	37	N/A
<i>Highland</i>		
Alness Academy	26	83
Invergordon Academy	18	35
Inverness High School	14	68
Kinlochleven High School	38	64
Lochaber High School	31	55
Tain Royal Academy	34	62
Wick High School	26	62
<i>Moray</i>		
Elgin High School	29	44
Average for all Schools	29	53

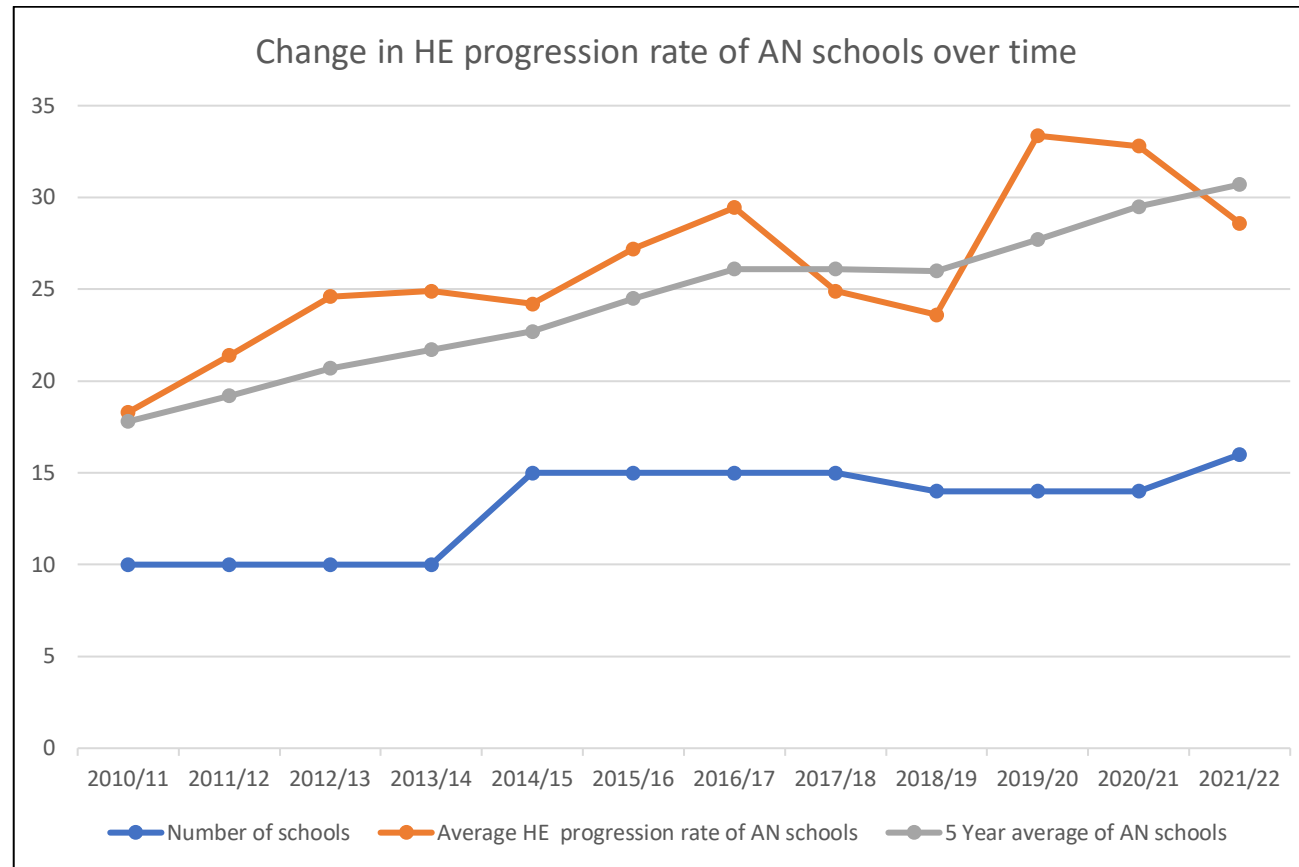
NOTE:

The overall 5 year average progression rate amongst the schools is 30.8%, a considerable increase from the baseline of 18.3% used with the original allocation of schools.

Overall progression rate to HE achieved within the target schools

Progression rate to Higher Education: ASPIRENorth schools										
Annual HE progression rates at school level and comparison between the 5-year average baseline set at school joining programme and the 5-year average for 2021/2022		Years engaged with SHEP								
Local Authority	School Name	Programme	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	School HE progression baseline - 5 year average at joining programme	School HE progression average-5 years 17/18 to 21/22	Change in 5 year progression rate
Scotland		12	41	40	44	45	41	36	42.2	6.2
North Region Average		12	39	35	42	40	38	34	38.8	5.1
Aberdeen City		12	42	40	47	46	43		43.6	
Aberdeen City	Lochside Academy	4	*	19	28	26	22	*	23.7	*
Aberdeen City	Northfield Academy	12	10	6	18	17	6	9.2	11.3	2.1
Aberdeen City	St Machar Academy	12	27	25	32	32	29	18.8	29.1	10.3
Aberdeen City	Harlaw Academy	1	40	39	44	43	46	40.0	42.4	2.4
Aberdeen City	Hazlehead Academy	1	34	42	49	35	46	39.0	41.3	2.3
Aberdeenshire		3	39	32	47	47	43		41.6	
Aberdeen-shire	Fraserburgh Academy	3	31	32	40	34	27	34.0	32.8	-1.2
Aberdeen-shire	Peterhead Academy	3	30	29	27	27	29	26.8	28.4	1.6
Aberdeen-shire	The Gordon Schools	1	36	38	38	41	37	38.0	37.9	-0.1
Highland		12	35	32	39	36	38		36.0	
Highland	Alness Academy	12	25	26	33	30	26	19.8	28.0	8.2
Highland	Invergordon Academy	3	25	42	49	34	18	37.5	33.7	-3.8
Highland	Inverness High School	12	13	15	20	16	14	12.6	15.6	3.0
Highland	Kinlochleven High School	12	27	40	42	45	38	22.0	38.4	16.4
Highland	Lochaber High School	3	29	27	27	35	31	27.4	29.8	2.4
Highland	Tain Royal Academy	3	38	30	34	43	34	34.3	35.8	1.5
Highland	Wick High School	12	24	27	34	44	26	21.6	31.0	9.4
Moray		12	39	32	40	37	32		36.0	
Moray	Elgin High School	12	34	26	43	33	29	21.4	33.0	11.6
Average across all AN schools			28.2	28.9	34.9	33.4	28.7	26.8	30.8	3.9

* Lochside -New school created from the amalgamation of Torry Academy and Kincorth Academy



Analysis of school progression rates:

The table on page 6 shows the change in progression rate over a 5 year period for all ASPIRENorth schools both individually and aggregated and compares it to the regional and national progression rates over the same period.

At the core of the work of ASPIRENorth is the relationship development, and the continuum of targeted and sustained engagement and support to pupils and their schools. So, we were concerned that with less in-person engagement during the pandemic relationships would have suffered.

However, you will see from the table that with the hard work of our staff to rebuild those relationships when meeting face to face, our progress in improving HE progression has continued.

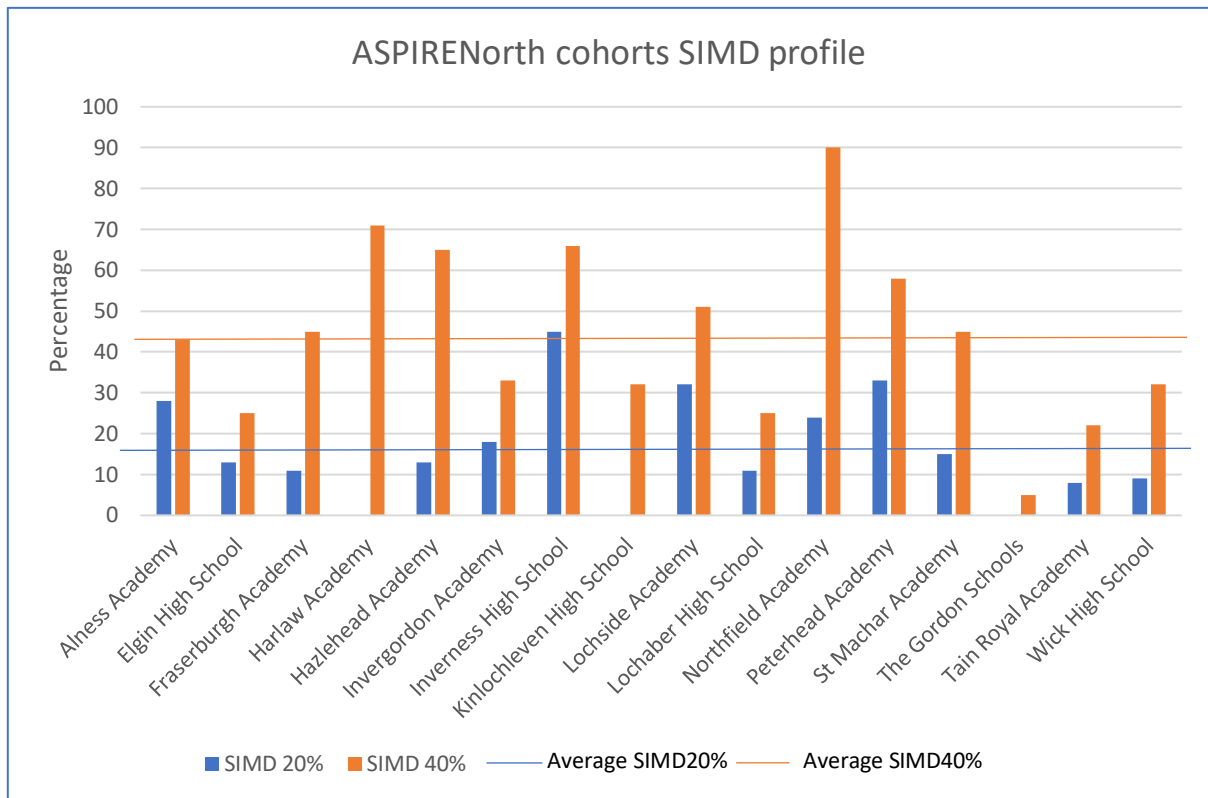
The average '5-year' HE progression rate amongst the schools has increased from the baseline of 26.8% (which was set when the schools were selected to join the programme) to 30.8%, an increase of 3.9%.

The average progression rate is 28.7% for this reporting year (2021/22) which is a decrease from the last 2 reporting years but higher than the pre-covid rate in 2018/19, see graph on page 7. The years 19/20 and 20/21 were the years of the greatest disruption caused by the Pandemic. Exam results were found to be slightly inflated and therefore inevitably the reported results will also have been affected so a decrease this year to pre-pandemic levels is not unexpected.

Interestingly, tracking the 5 year average of ASPIRENorth schools from 2010 through to 2021 shows a statistically significant increase ($P = 0.0001$) showing that we have been contributing positively to the aim of increasing the progression rate to HE in the schools which we work for the past 12 years.

ASPIRENorth school cohorts' SIMD statistics:

The graph below shows the 2021-2022 SIMD 20/40 percentages for cohorts from S3-S6 in each ASPIRENorth school.



The graph above shows, 6 of the schools have more than 50% of participating ASPIRENorth pupils from a SIMD 20/40 area, with 6 others above 30%.

Harlaw Academy, Hazlehead Academy, Inverness High School and Northfield Academy have very high SIMD 20/40 representation on the programme, with an average of 73% of pupils from these four schools coming from an SIMD 20/40 area.

The identification of pupils from SIMD 20/40 areas is important in aiding Higher Education Institutions with their targets of increasing the numbers of SIMD 20 entrants. The work of the SHEP programmes helps to ensure that pupils from this demographic are aware of all the opportunities and have support in application to a Higher Education course of study should this be appropriate for them.

The use of postcodes to measure deprivation in our predominantly rural areas does not always reflect the true issues some of our pupils have to face.

For example:

- A lack of access to services and to transport, which prohibits engagement in widening access opportunities offered to other pupils by Higher Education Institutions.

Impact on ASPIRENorth Cohorts

Schools	No. of pupils engaged at S5	Proportion of all S5 pupils in cohort (%)	No. of pupils engaged at S6	Proportion of all S6 pupils in cohort (%)	Total number of S5&S6 leavers going into HE	Progression rate of cohort to HE (%)	Above or below 22% progression to HE (%)
<i>Aberdeen City</i>							
Harlaw Academy	4	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Hazlehead Academy	10	8	N/A	N/A	4	80	+58
Lochside Academy	17	10	8	17	9	60	+38
Northfield Academy	23	19	16	47	6	24	+2
St Machar Academy	29	19	23	29	18	78	+56.26
<i>Aberdeenshire</i>							
Fraserburgh Academy	15	10	8	13	3	23	+1.08
Peterhead Academy	17	11	N/A	N/A	1	9	-12.91
The Gordon Schools	6	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Highland</i>							
Alness Academy	23	44	17	40	15	83	+61.33
Invergordon Academy	21	41	15	65	8	35	+12.78
Inverness High School	36	43	18	34	13	68	+46.42
Kinlochleven High School	16	94	11	69	7	64	+41.63
Lochaber High School	25	21	11	11	6	55	+32.54
Tain Royal Academy	20	25	17	38	13	62	+39.90
Wick High School	29	26	30	48	24	62	+39.54
<i>Moray</i>							
Elgin High School	29	27	30	50	15	44	+22.12
Total for All Schools	320	18	204	32	142	52.99	+30.99

The table above shows information on the cohorts we have worked with in each school. In 2021/22 our cohorts consisted of 18% of all S5 pupils and 32% of all S6 pupils in the schools.

The ASPIRENorth team continue to be called upon by school staff to assist more and more in a climate where schools are under resourced, and guidance staff find themselves dealing with more social issues rather than dealing with academic guidance questions. This means that many more pupils benefitted from working with our teams and in this academic year we delivered information sessions and 1:1 activities to an additional 540 pupils.

Cohort Staying on Rates:

Staying on rates at target schools for 2021- 2022 (i.e., pupils staying on from S4 to S5)

School Name	Staying on rate of cohort (%)21-22
<i>Aberdeen City</i>	
Harlaw Academy	100.00
Hazlehead Academy	84.38
Lochside Academy	53.57
Northfield Academy	92.86
St Machar Academy	90.32
<i>Aberdeenshire</i>	
Fraserburgh Academy	68.97
Peterhead Academy	76.67
The Gordon Schools	100.00
<i>Highland</i>	
Alness Academy	90.00
Invergordon Academy	100.00
Inverness High School	88.00
Kinlochleven High School	N/A
Lochaber High School	N/A
Tain Royal Academy	96.00
Wick High School	86.66
<i>Moray</i>	
Elgin High School	N/A
Average for all Schools	86.72

The table above shows the staying on rate from S4 to S5 for all ASPIRENorth cohorts.

This table indicates that participation in the ASPIRENorth programme is a positive factor in the pupil's decision to stay on at school beyond their statutory leaving date. An average of 86.72% of our cohort pupils chose to stay on at school into their 5th year. This has dropped from 91% in the previous year. Factors affecting this include the Covid 19 pandemic, the economic crisis; whereby pupils look to support families with an income and the impact of DYW in raising the profile of Modern Apprenticeships which allow further study with an income.

Destinations as % of SHEP 2021 - 2022 S5 & S6 Leavers

School Name	Total number of leavers (S5&S6)	Higher Education	Further Education	Modern Apprenticeships	Employment	Unemployed Seeking	Unemployed not seeking	Voluntary Work/Training	Unknown
<i>Aberdeen City</i>									
Harlaw Academy	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Hazlehead Academy	5	80.00	0.00	20.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Lochside Academy	15	60.00	20.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	13.33	0.00	6.67
Northfield Academy	25	24.00	40.00	4.00	16.00	4.00	0.00	0.00	12.00
St Machar Academy	23	78.26	13.04	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	8.70
<i>Aberdeenshire</i>									
Fraserburgh Academy	13	23.08	46.15	0.00	15.38	0.00	0.00	7.69	7.69
Peterhead Academy	11	9.09	63.64	0.00	27.27	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
The Gordon Schools	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Highland</i>									
Alness Academy	18	83.33	0.00	0.00	11.11	5.56	0.00	0.00	0.00
Invergordon Academy	23	34.78	8.70	13.04	39.13	4.35	0.00	0.00	0.00
Inverness High School	19	68.42	0.00	0.00	31.58	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Kinlochleven High School	11	63.63	18.18	0.00	18.18	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Lochaber High School	11	54.54	0.00	0.00	36.36	0.00	9.09	0.00	0.00
Tain Royal Academy	21	61.90	9.52	0.00	23.81	4.76	0.00	0.00	0.00
Wick High School	39	61.54	10.26	15.38	10.26	0.00	2.56	0.00	0.00
<i>Moray</i>									
Elgin High School	34	44.12	11.76	11.76	29.41	2.94	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total for All Schools	268	52.98	16.04	5.59	19.03	1.86	1.49	0.37	3.35

As you can see from the table above, the majority of pupils who have not entered HE have gained positive destinations in Further Education, Employment and Modern Apprenticeship. The percentage of pupils in employment is the highest it has been since academic year 2011/12, possibly showing the impact of the pandemic and economic crisis on decisions that pupils are making regarding their pathways.

Summary of Activity

School	Year group	Cohort Pupil number	Workshops	1:1 interviews carried out
Alness Academy	S3	21	2	0
	S4	28	6	57
	S5	23	5	54
	S6	17	4	14
Elgin High School	S3	7	1	7
	S4	0	0	0
	S5	29	0	0
	S6	30	3	16
Fraserburgh Academy	S3	24	2	20
	S4	24	6	5
	S5	15	6	5
	S6	8	4	30
Harlaw Academy	S3	15	2	0
	S4	2	4	2
	S5	4	4	4
	S6	N/A	4	N/A
Hazlehead Academy	S3	25	2	18
	S4	29	4	11
	S5	10	4	9
	S6	0	0	11
Invergordon Academy	S3	26	2	24
	S4	25	6	20
	S5	21	4	18
	S6	15	4	22
Inverness High School	S3	29	2	27
	S4	30	6	26
	S5	36	4	22
	S6	18	7	32
Kinlochleven High School	S3	N/A	N/A	N/A
	S4	N/A	N/A	N/A
	S5	16	2	0
	S6	11	1	6
Lochaber High School	S3	N/A	N/A	N/A
	S4	16	4	5
	S5	25	2	18
	S6	11	3	27
Lochside Academy	S3	27	2	20
	S4	28	6	5
	S5	17	4	8
	S6	8	5	25

Northfield Academy	S3	27	2	16
	S4	25	6	5
	S5	23	6	14
	S6	16	5	18
Peterhead Academy	S3	22	2	19
	S4	18	7	6
	S5	17	6	16
	S6	N/A	3	48
St. Machar Academy	S3	30	2	22
	S4	31	4	16
	S5	29	6	32
	S6	23	5	55
Tain Royal Academy	S3	31	2	25
	S4	16	6	14
	S5	20	5	18
	S6	17	8	9
The Gordon Schools	S3	29	2	0
	S4	1	0	1
	S5	6	2	8
	S6	N/A	N/A	N/A
Wick High School	S3	36	1	0
	S4	25	6	22
	S5	29	4	23
	S6	30	4	49
Totals		1171	221	996

In addition to the work with our cohorts, our team establish working relationships with the school staff, parents and partners to help facilitate the activities and build understanding of the HE environment. In this academic year we carried out 8 parents information events, 11 teacher information sessions and held 28 planning meetings to ensure our work was dovetailing with other initiatives in school and was being delivered at appropriate times. We also participated in 8 partner or school activities including a school curriculum planning event and Education Scotland inspection discussions.

This year was a challenging year for engagement of our volunteers due to Covid-19 restrictions and lack of residential opportunities. We did manage to engage 2 volunteers during online parental information sessions which has helped to keep volunteers active in our programme.

Qualitative Summary

The following statements have been offered for inclusion in the annual report by pupils and parents, to help give a flavour of their experience whilst working with ASPIRENorth. These statements show the breadth of support and experiences we give to pupils to help with their pathway planning.

Lochside Academy pupil – January 2022 – *Thank you for all your help with my personal statement. I have received an unconditional offer for RGU for International Tourism management which is my first choice so I am absolutely delighted and can now relax.*

Fraserburgh Academy pupil – November 2021 – *Thank you so much for organising the chat with the student studying to be a Home economics teacher at Perth. It was really helpful and has convinced me that this is definitely what I want to do.*

Northfield Academy S6 pupil - *Thank you for all your help, Lesley-Ann, I have decided to go to college and do the HNC. I still want to apply for teaching in the future, but I think college is the best route for me right now.*

Peterhead Academy S6 pupil - *just received a conditional for RGU for midwifery. I'm so chuffed and want to thank you so much for helping me with my application, and for taking the time to help me with interview prep. Thank you.*

Lochaber High School pupil - *Thank you for all the help throughout the years and for giving me more knowledge on what I would like to pursue after school via the Aspirenorth lessons I had in classes/assemblies.*

Invergordon Academy pupil – *Aspire North gave me a bit more confidence to move to uni. They have helped me be mindful of certain things when attending uni and getting settled in.*

Tain Royal Academy Pupil – *Aspire North supported me a lot during my senior years at Tain Royal Academy when I was applying to study PE teaching. They made pre-application enquiries to various universities on my behalf which helped me find out which subjects and grades I would need to achieve in S6. As well as providing great support to write my personal statement, Aspire North gave me advice on academic interviews as well as doing mock interviews with me, which really helped me feel prepared for the real thing. Aspire North's workshops on funding, budgeting and also on student life skills were very useful to me in getting ready for life at university. Now in my 2nd year studying PE teaching at Edinburgh University, I have also recently become a Student Volunteer with Aspire North where I help give advice to current school pupils on what being a student is like.*

Inverness High School pupil – *Having been on the Aspire North programme for S5 and S6, I attended lots of their workshops and activities including an S6 residential trip which helped me write my UCAS personal statement. The advice I received over the years helped me choose my path and I have just begun studying BSc Maths and Physics at Strathclyde. Having recently become estranged from my family, Aspire North supported me a lot with student accommodation applications and various funding applications which has made attending university possible.*

Student volunteer – *Since my third year of high school, I have worked with AspireNorth by attending many university and residential trips they organised. They have been able to show me my options and different paths for achieving my aspirations. I have now continued on with*

AspireNorth as a volunteer as it is an organisation close to my heart and wish to help them continue their important work.

Parent of Northfield S6 pupil - *I wanted you to know that after receiving 4 conditional offers 3 for uni of Abdn and one for RGU journalism Jessica is going with journalism she has just confirmed her choice. I can't thank you enough for all your help and patience.*

Alness Academy Guidance Teacher - *Aspire North are one of the most supportive organisations that I have worked with in my 15 years of teaching. The staff go above & beyond time & time again to support the young people, their families & the school with their service. Aspire North are friendly, approachable & very professional. It is a delight to have them in the school working with our young people, they get on well with our staff. Our parents are always very positive about their experience with Aspire North. Our young people love taking part in the activities & trips offered. Their support during our UCAS period is immeasurable & the advice we receive as staff in helping our young people with UCAS helps us out a lot.*

Financial Statement 2021/2022

	Reporting Period/ £
Income Received	
SFC grant awarded	£451,772
Institutional contribution	
Other co-funding	
Return of underspend (50% from 2019-20)	(£35,207)
Total Income (Re-profiled)	£416,565
Expenditure (Add or amend categories as needed)	
Salaries	£365,281
Equipment	£3,663
Consumables	£36,218
Travel & Subsistence	£31,835
Other:	£25,951
Other:	£19,766
Total Expenditure	£482,714
Balance	(£66,149)

Note:

The significant overspend is due to a return of funds to SFC following underspend in 2019/20. The proportion of the underspend that we were allowed to keep (50%) we have then begun to utilise for Covid recovery in the form of residential and experiential activities for pupils who between the years March 2020 to date have not had any residential or campus experiences.