Education Scotland
Foghlam Alba

College Progress Visit Report

Shetland UHI

24 June 2022

College Principal	Professor Jane Lewis
Progress Visit (PV) Date	21 April 2022
College Nominee	Kevin Briggs
Lead Inspector	Joe Mulholland
College HMI	John Bowditch
Outcome of Progress Visit	Satisfactory progress

Purpose of the progress visit

Progress Visits (PV) are planned collaboratively between the college, Education Scotland and Scottish Funding Council (SFC). The team carrying out a PV engages with staff, learners and other stakeholders and produce a summary report for each college, which will be shared with the principal, college Regional Board and/or College Board of Management.

Overall judgement regarding progress

At the end of the PV, HM Inspectors of Education, Associate Assessors and Student Team Members review the evidence gathered during their discussions with college managers, staff, learners and stakeholders. They assess the progress that colleges have made against their Action Plans, taking account of any changes to local circumstances. Based on this evidence, the team will form a view as to whether the college has made satisfactory progress against its Action Plans or has not made satisfactory progress. This outcome is contained within this report with accompanying commentary to support the findings.

The PV for Shetland UHI explored five overarching themes linked to the college's enhancement plan and priorities around COVID-19 recovery. The themes are:

- Curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment;
- Services to support learning;
- Learner engagement;
- Evaluation to facilitate improvement; and
- Learner progress and outcomes.

Background and context

The college and its context

Shetland UHI was formed in August 2021 through the merger of Shetland College UHI, North Atlantic Fisheries College Marine Centre UHI, and Train Shetland. The most northern academic partner of the University of Highlands and Islands (UHI), the college is responsible for delivering an agreed volume of credits for the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) within the region. Shetland UHI has a Board of Management, reports to UHI as the Regional Strategic Body and is working to become an Assigned College.

Shetland UHI operates from two main campuses in Lerwick and Scalloway to deliver a range of further education (FE) and higher education (HE) programmes up to and including level 11 on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The college collaborates with the two secondary schools in Shetland to provide vocational opportunities for young people in the senior phase.

The college delivers around 4,500 SFC credits of activity each year and employs 122 staff.

Findings from the progress visit

Curriculum, learning and teaching and assessment

Areas of positive progress

- The recent college merger is having a positive influence on developing and enhancing the curriculum. Most college managers report that an increase in cross-curricular working and roll-out of more efficient systems for delivery are having a direct impact on enhancing the learning experience. For example, staff in the Creative Industry and Mechanical Engineering departments are working together to co-design a Creative Welding programme.

- College managers participate purposefully in a wide range of forums at local and regional level and across the UHI network. Staff engage constructively with stakeholders and draw productively on discussions to plan and design a curriculum that meets the needs of industry and communities.

- Most learners describe how teaching staff adjusted their learning and teaching approaches to enable them to continue their studies during COVID-19 campus restrictions. Staff prioritised access to campus facilities for learners requiring to undertake practical tasks and those requiring access to support for mental health and wellbeing.

- Teaching teams took opportunities to reflect on the impact of the hybrid delivery model to capture and roll-out best practice and made adjustments to programmes based on learner and peer feedback.

- Almost all learners value the commitment and support of teaching staff. They report that the enthusiasm and responsiveness shown by their teachers encourages them to progress and achieve in their programme of study.

- Prior to the pandemic, due to longstanding involvement with UHI, the majority of teaching staff were experienced and competent in utilising digital resources to deliver learning and teaching remotely. Teaching staff requiring upskilling to deliver programmes digitally, benefitted from effective peer support and online professional development packages. As a result, all college programmes were migrated effectively to remote delivery.

- Staff use two digital platforms, one for meetings and the other for the delivery of online learning and teaching. For all learners and staff, the simplicity of using a single platform for learning and teaching provides a consistent and reliable vehicle for online communication, delivery of lessons and repository for learning materials. Learners are also supported well by access to helpful resources made available through the virtual learning environment (VLE).

- All teaching staff work effectively with awarding bodies to adapt and adopt alternative, summative assessment arrangements. Learners engage well with new and revised assessment arrangements and value the more holistic approaches gained through themed projects sand portfolio building, and open book assignments. These arrangements provide learners with useful systems to gather and capture evidence of learning to validate their performance.

Areas for further progress and actions required

- None Identified

Services to support learning

Areas of positive progress

- Student Services teams provide a wide range of purposeful support for learners. This includes advice on funding, support for mental health and wellbeing, information about courses, and guidance on employment and career options. In addition to face-to-face meetings, learners are able to speak remotely to advisers by telephone or video call. Learners have easy access to UHI websites that contain helpful information on a range of topics relevant to digital study and wider support.

- Almost all staff proactively signpost learners to college and online resources that support mental health and wellbeing. The Student Counsellor worked well with the Highlands and Islands Students' Association (HISA) to coordinate a range of initiatives to support learners. This included scheduling 'wellbeing walks' and distributing 'pamper packs'.

- The college makes good use of the UHI website to enable learners to access qualified counsellors online through a variety of formats, including: virtually via webcam, instant messaging, telephone and email.

- From the start of the pandemic, effective arrangements were put in place to assist learners who did not have access to digital resources. Staff worked quickly to provide learners with relevant hardware, software and connectivity to the internet. In some remote areas of Shetland where connectivity is not achievable, learners are able to book digital campus spaces. These arrangements and resources enabled learners to continue to participate in their programme.

- Full-time learners engaged actively in induction programmes delivered through online sessions and face-to-face activities on campus. Activities included specific instruction and guidance on using digital platforms in lessons and independent learning situations, which helped learners to gain confidence in undertaking learning remotely.

- Personal academic advisors schedule regular meetings with full-time learners to engage them in reflecting on, and discussing their college programme. They maintain an overview of how well learners are progressing and arrange assistance for those requiring additional advice or support. This on-going engagement encourages learners to stay on course.

Area for further progress and actions required

- The process for applying for student funding is paper-based. This is limiting the efficacy of arrangements for making and processing applications and disbursing payments. Learners and staff would benefit from this facility being made available online.

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Areas of positive progress

- HISA is represented on the college senior management group and various academic committees. HISA participation in these forums is enabling the learner voice to be heard at a strategic level and is helping to ensure a focus on the learner experience.

- In the majority of subject areas, class representatives contribute productively to curriculum programme team meetings. There are many examples of learner opinion influencing the planning and design of the curriculum and most learners are confident that their feedback leads to effective change within their programme area.

- Learners can articulate the benefits and disadvantages of hybrid delivery models. While some enjoy the flexibility of remote working to fit around family and employment commitments, others prefer the structure and social interaction of learning on-campus.

- The college makes good use of the UHI website to provide further opportunities for learners to suggest improvements or provide feedback on what is going well. Learner responses are forwarded to the Dean of Students to action and keep learners informed.

Areas for further progress and actions required

- In some departments, a few programmes do not have a class representative.

- Some learners identified a need for a social area to support learner interaction across programmes. Currently, there is no common space within the college campuses.

Evaluation to facilitate improvement

Areas of positive progress

- The college continues to use well-established systems to engage staff in professional reflection and evaluation. Staff engage well in these processes and action planning for enhancement takes good account of feedback and reflection gathered through these activities.

- Staff regularly provide learners with opportunities to evaluate their own learning and provide feedback on their programme through various evaluation surveys and class discussions.

- Almost all learners are asked for feedback by their lecturer at the end of each unit and teaching staff value real-time learner feedback to make timeous adjustments to curriculum delivery.

- Course teams engage regularly and productively in online meetings to review the impact of curriculum design and effectiveness of learning and teaching approaches. Reflection on progress is made on previous years' action plans, and identification of areas for development. These meeting are used constructively by staff to analyse performance and identify any actions to improve programme delivery and the learner experience.

- The Board of Management's sub-committee for Learning, Teaching and Research, meets periodically to monitor the direction and performance of learning and teaching arrangements across the college. The work of this committee provides a college-wide oversight of learning and teaching performance that drives improvement strategically.

- Staff conferences are held regularly and provide a useful forum for staff to share effective practice with their peers. Through these events, staff are enabled and supported to enhance their practice through gaining and refreshing knowledge and skills relevant to their role.

Areas for further progress and actions required

- None identified

Learner progress and outcomes

Areas of positive progress

- Rates of withdrawal for learners on part-time FE programmes for 2020-21 are low at 4.9% which is one of the lowest in the college sector.

- Attainment rates for learners on part-time FE programmes are high and have been above sector performance for the last three years, despite the impact of COVID-19. The attainment rates for learners on part-time FE programmes 2020-21 is 83.8%, which is 7.5 percentage points above average national performance levels.

Area for further progress and actions required

- During academic year 2020-21, withdrawal and partial success rates for learners on full-time FE programmes have increased.

- The attainment rate for learners on full-time FE programmes for 2020-21 are slightly below (1.6 percentage points) the average national performance level.

What happens next?

The progress visit report will be shared with SFC, the College Board (and in multi-college regions, the Regional Strategic Body).

Joe Mulholland
HM Inspector