

Annual Engagement Visit Report

Shetland UHI

11 July 2023

College Principal	Professor Jane Lewis
Annual Engagement Visit Date	25 May 2023
College Nominee	Laura Burden
College HMI	Dr John Laird

1. Background

Annual Engagement Visits (AEV) are planned collaboratively between the college, HM Inspectors and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). During the AEV, the team focussed on the progress made on improvement priorities and the outcomes of previous engagement with HM Inspectors. HM Inspectors met with staff, learners and other stakeholders. This report outlines the findings from the visit, and includes aspects of positive practice, aspects for improvement, and any associated main points for action. The report will be shared with the college Principal, college Board of Management, and/or Regional Strategic Body. An accompanying short report will be published on Education Scotland's website.

During the AEV the team explored the following overarching themes linked to the college's enhancement plan and priorities around COVID-19 recovery: learner recruitment; retention; attainment; and progression.

2. The college and its context

UHI Shetland was formed in August 2021 through the merger of Shetland College UHI, NAFC 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.

UHI Shetland operates from two main campuses in Lerwick and Scalloway, and across several rural learning centres, 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 seven secondary schools in Shetland to provide vocational opportunities for young people from S3 through to S6. UHI Shetland supports over 480 modern apprentices working with over 80 employers.

The college delivers around 4,330 SFC credits of activity each year and employs 120 staff.

3. Summary of findings

3.1 Recruitment

Areas of positive progress

Learner progress and outcomes

- Learner recruitment to full-time FE programmes has remained steady from the previous year and recruitment to part-time FE programmes has increased by 18%. The college is meeting its activity targets.

Curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment

- Effective staff engagement with local schools has resulted in improved recruitment to college programmes and a broadening of the curriculum offer within some subject areas. This ensures applicants have more choices and more progression opportunities.
- Teaching staff design and deliver programmes to meet the needs of disadvantaged groups very well. For example, the Bridges and New Directions programmes, devised through collaborative partnership discussions, meet learner needs well and encourage those with a limited success in prior attainment to develop appropriate study and work skills.

Services to support learning

- All learners confirm that the college application process is easy to navigate and complete. Those who feel they are in need of further advice during the application process receive a quick response and are well supported by staff.
- All learners can discuss with college staff the range of support options available to help them settle into their programme and to meet their individual support needs. This includes receiving support from guidance tutors, making use of on line support, and making use of information contained within college posters.

Learner engagement

- All learners value and make good use of the programme and learner support information they receive before they start at college. As a result of college staff's productive discussions held with local school staff, applicants from schools are well informed about suitable career pathways.
- All learners recognise and value the high quality support and productive relationships with their tutors. They feel comfortable discussing any relevant concerns directly with curriculum staff, rather than going through a Student Voice representative.

Evaluation to support improvement

- Learners provide feedback on their programme experiences to curriculum staff and are able to give examples of where their feedback has resulted in changes to programme delivery.

- Most curriculum managers use learner feedback well to tailor programme delivery and meet learning needs. There is effective support for digital literacy and this helps learners, many of whom reside in remote locations, to overcome barriers, engage in their learning and continue with their studies.

3.2 Retention

Areas of positive progress

Learner progress and outcomes

- Rates of learner withdrawal for full-time FE programmes have reduced from the previous year and compare well with the sector norm.
- Rates of learner withdrawal from part time FE programmes are very low at 3.2% and have been maintained over the last two years. This is better than the sector norm.

Curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment

- Senior college staff have enhanced and improved working practices with secondary schools, particularly at S2 and S3. This has worked well resulting in clear educational pathway choices for young people. These arrangements help young people make better informed decisions about appropriate options.
- Teaching teams take care to ensure learners benefit from an appropriate balance of campus-delivered and remote learning activities. Digital technology is used mainly to support learning rather than deliver it, with a greater focus on making useful learning materials available for independent study. This is helpful in promoting social development and peer support.
- Teaching teams have made adjustments to the Foundation Apprenticeship programme in response to high rates of learner withdrawal from the two year delivery model. The adoption of one year Senior Phase programmes has been well received and has been more effective in retaining learners and helping them to succeed.

Services to support learning

- Support staff work diligently to ensure all learners are aware of the range of support services available and how to access them.
- Learners are clear where to go for wellbeing support, and counselling services are available promptly for an initial assessment followed by appropriate support. There are, additionally, on line resources available to help learners deal with wellbeing matters.

Learner engagement

- The teaching staff make good use of on-campus working, and are better able to recognise quickly if learners are concerned or struggling, and therefore put appropriate help and support in place sooner.

Evaluation to support improvement

- Learners have a high level of trust in the staff they work with. They are confident that any feedback given or concerns raised with teaching or support service staff will be taken seriously and actioned quickly.

Areas for development

- The work of the Students Association (SA) is underdeveloped. It has not devised a programme of activities to enable learners to develop a sense of belonging or to contribute to college life through social, campaigning or cultural events.
- Few learners contribute to the work of the SA. At the time of the visit only seven learners were participating as Student Voice Representatives. As a result, student feedback to influence change and improvement is limited.
- Learner bursary provision is managed by the local council. However, the college does not have sufficient information on the process to determine whether this is working well for all applicants and learners.
- As there is no process in place for following up applications that are started but not completed, the reasons why some applicants may not complete is unclear, limiting the opportunity for improvement.
- Support service staff are not routinely invited to explain their services to all class groups, and this reduces learner awareness levels of the range of support services available.

3.3 Attainment

Areas of positive progress

Learner progress and outcomes

- The majority of learners who undertake a programme at UHI Shetland make good progress and achieve their certificated award.
- The overall attainment rate for learners on full-time FE programmes is 70%, which is a 12% increase on the previous year, and 11% above the sector norm. This is a return to pre-pandemic attainment levels.
- The overall attainment rate for learners on part-time FE programmes is 89.6%, which is a 6% increase on the previous year, and is 13% above the sector norm.

Curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment

- The curriculum offer has been enhanced and now contains more part-time and employed provision, which better meets the education and training needs of the local community.

Services to support learning

- Staff work well together to identify where a learner would benefit from tailored support provision. Where a need is identified, they respond well and ensure support provision is provided timeously.

Learner engagement

- Throughout the year staff organise and deliver a small number of study sessions and social events to help develop a sense of community. However, to date, these have been limited and have not yet been supported fully by members of the SA.

Evaluation to support improvement

- Managers have made good progress in aligning policies and procedures for the newly merged college. As a result there is a high level of consistency in approaches taken in relation to key college evaluative activities. Staff confirm they have a sense of coherence and consistency in their work approaches.
- College managers have a clear focus on development and enhancement priorities, They are implementing improvement plans at a steady but manageable pace, and working collaboratively to keep a sense of staff involvement and engagement.
- The Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey (SSES) has an improved participation rate for the current year. Satisfaction rates are very high at 96%.

Areas for development

- None identified

3.4 Progression

Areas of positive progress

Learner progress and outcomes

- Almost all learners progress on to a positive destination by entering the world of work, continuing with further education or progressing to higher education.
- Industry and community partners engage well with college managers to provide learners with work placements, industry talks, and visits to workplaces. This provides learners with valuable insights into their chosen progression pathway.

Curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment

- All learners recognise meta skills are developed and used in their programme and felt college staff prepare them well for their next destination.
- The college and the local authority engage productively to meet regional employment demand through the Health and Social Care Academy. To help engagement the local authority fund learners' lunch and travel expenses. The programme attracts learners who are

furthest from the job market. It also provides guaranteed job interviews for successful learners.

Services to support learning

- All learners who are progressing on to higher education feel well supported by college staff. Learners benefit from tailored support when completing UCAS applications, and are given helpful guidance on what to expect when embarking on a higher education pathway.
- All returning adult learners feel well supported by the range of college services. Useful and clear advice is given to learners and this helps them make well informed decisions about programmes, funding and modes of learning.

Learner engagement

- The majority of curriculum staff teams have a strong industry focus and have well established relationships with employers. This ensures learners have useful access to employment opportunities to meet the needs of the regional economy.

Evaluation to support improvement

- Almost all curriculum managers use learner feedback well to evaluate curriculum programmes and plan for improvement.

Areas for development

- None identified

4. Main Points for Action

- There are no main points for action required.

5. What happens next?

We are confident that the college has made satisfactory progress and has the capacity to continue to improve. We will continue to monitor progress through ongoing engagement with the link HM Inspector.

Dr John Laird
HM Inspector