

18 July 2023

Professor Jane Lewis  
Principal and Chief Executive  
UHI Shetland

Dear Professor Lewis

On the 25 and 26 May 2023 a team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited Shetland UHI to undertake an Annual Engagement Visit looking at further education (FE) provision. During our visit, we talked to learners, staff and stakeholders, and worked closely with the senior managers. The team found the following major strengths in the college's work.

### **Recruitment**

Recruitment to full-time FE programmes has remained steady from the previous year. Recruitment to part-time FE programmes has increased by 18%. The college is meeting its activity targets. 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. All learners confirm that the college application process is easy to navigate and to 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 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.

### **Retention**

The full-time FE learner withdrawal rate has reduced from the previous year and now compares very favourably with the sector norm. The part time FE withdrawal rate is very low at 3.2% and has been maintained over the last two years. It is considerably better than the sector norm. 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. 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. 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.

### **Attainment**

The 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-lockdown attainment levels. The 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. 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. 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.

## Progression

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

The following area for improvement was identified by the team and discussed with the senior managers:

- The work of the Students Association 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.
- 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.

There were no main points for action identified.

### What happens next?

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

Dr John Laird  
HM Inspector