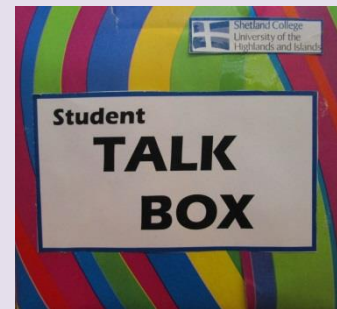


Talk Box

1) Outline the project or initiative and what makes it innovative and inspiring (max 300 words).

Following a trial period in academic year 2012-13, Shetland College UHI promotes Talk Boxes as a quick and anonymous method for learners to provide feedback on any aspect of studying at the college. Learners can provide written comments via physical Talk Boxes placed throughout the college (and learning centres) or through a Talk Box page on the college website which includes an electronic feedback form. Talk Boxes provide an accessible route for learner feedback, with responses on prominent display in the college for learners, staff and visitors to see. They provide a clear indication that the college is committed to empowering the learner voice.



2) Detail how the project or initiative was delivered, from the planning stage through to its successful conclusion (max 300 words). Include details of timing* and funding.

A strategic priority of Shetland College UHI is to empower the learner voice; therefore it is important to have in place suitable opportunities for learners to provide feedback. Equally important is to 'close the loop' and show learners that their feedback has been taken seriously. There were plans in 2012-13 to put a 'you said, we did' board on display in the canteen area, to show how learner feedback had been actioned. This idea was developed into Talk Boxes – a network of anonymous suggestion boxes placed throughout the college buildings and learning centres. To meet the needs of those learners who study online or via distance learning, a Talk Box page of the website was produced which allows learners to provide feedback (through an online form) and read responses from staff.



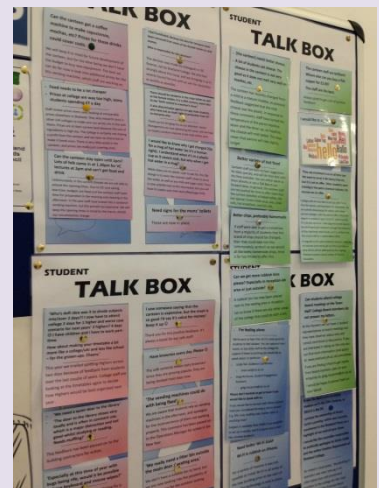
Talk Boxes are managed by the Communications and Student Engagement Assistant, which provides important mediation between learners and relevant staff. If lecturers or other support staff were reading the comments, they may recognise handwriting and identify the learners involved. Student engagement staff could be viewed as a more neutral party, allowing learners to have their concerns addressed without being singled out.

The trial period in 2012-13 was considered a success, and Talk Boxes have continued to be part of Shetland College UHI's learner engagement strategy. They are encouraged as an opportunity to provide feedback on any aspect of college life. Comments in the first semester of 2014-15 included: complaints about the reduced bus service, broken vending machines, art censorship, communication channels with College Board members, condom and sanitary facilities, suggestions for where bins should be placed, and praise for the brownies in the café! There has been fantastic use of Talk Boxes so far this academic session – with 35 comments received and responded to in semester 1 alone.

3) Outline the project or initiative's outcome(s) within the university and beyond with relevant supporting evidence, metrics or testimony where appropriate (max 400 words).

The presence of Talk Boxes throughout Shetland College locations provides a clear indicator that the college is prepared to engage with student feedback. Responses are put on prominent display in the café and social area, so that staff, learners and visitors can see how comments from learners have been acted upon. Feedback is also posted to the website so that all learners can access it.

In the January 2014 review of Shetland College UHI by HM Inspectors, it was noted that 'learners are provided with a range of opportunities to engage in the work and life of the college. Learners provide evaluative commentary on their experiences and suggestions for improvement through use of the online *Talk Box* feedback forum.'



Talk Boxes have become an established part of quality improvement processes at Shetland College UHI. Whereas course team meetings are primarily focused on learning and teaching matters, Talk Boxes can be used to provide feedback on any aspect of their time at Shetland College – for example: operations, health & safety, equalities, student experience, or curriculum. Through Talk Boxes, learners have contributed feedback to all of these aspects of Shetland College UHI, and more.

Below is a selection of Talk Box comments from the first semester of 2014-15, with responses from staff.

• I'm feeling alone

We're sorry to hear that, as it is never good for students to feel isolated. You can approach your tutors, or any other staff at the college for support if there is anything you would like to speak about. In particular:

- Linda Tait, Guidance Coordinator:
 - ◊ linda.tait@uhi.ac.uk
- Greg McCarron, Student Engagement Assistant:
 - ◊ greg.mccarron@uhi.ac.uk

Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you would like to speak with us.

If you would like to connect with fellow students have you considered forming a club or society? E.g. film club, knitting club, hockey team, or anything else?

Support is available from UHISA if you would like to set up a society, and it is a great way to meet like-minded students!

Can students attend college board meetings at the Town Hall? College Board members do not answer my letters.

At the moment we can have 2 student representatives at board meetings but they have observer status only and cannot contribute to discussions. If you are interested in taking on this role you can find more information (and apply) at: www.shetland.uhi.ac.uk/committees.

If you are finding it hard to get replies from board members, pass on your enquiries to: greg.mccarron@uhi.ac.uk.

I would be happy to pursue them on your behalf.

- **We need public transport after class or bikes to rent in the bike shed!**
- **Bus users need road crossing at bottom of Gremista road, it's dangerous and very busy.**
- **It is really unfortunate for the bus to only come to college at half one and five o'clock. For people who can't get lifts it means walking in horrible weather.**
- **Bus to come at 4pm again. 5 o'clock is inconvenient for catching other buses to the country or to town.**
- **The college needs to arrange a bus for 4 when everyone's classes finish. Having to walk into town now is OK as the weather is dry, however in winter with snowy and icy conditions, it is not very safe for pupils to be walking with weather conditions like so. As well as the fact it being exhausting.**

Thanks to everyone for their comments on this issue. College staff are very aware that the recent reduction in the local bus service is extremely inconvenient for students, and raises legitimate health and safety concerns as the winter weather comes in force. College senior management have met with representatives from the council and ZetTrans to express these concerns, and the comments above have been shared directly.

Rhea Kay is currently organising a student petition to illustrate the strength of opinion on this topic.

If you would like to take part you can contact her directly via email: 10008185@uhi.ac.uk.

- **[the canteen] needs better cheese.**
- **A lot of students eat cheese. The cheese in the canteen is not very good as it does not melt very well on toasties, etc.**

The canteen has recently changed from a mild to a mature cheddar, as previous feedback suggested that the mild cheese was like plastic. In response to these comments, staff have turned the temperature of the panini machine down and the timer up, so hopefully the cheese will melt better. This does mean that paninis will take slightly longer.

- **They say enrolment is at an all-time low. We want to enrol in BA (Hons) Fine Art, but it is not on offer. Other students want training in the petro-chemical industry. No courses are on offer.**

College staff are also keen to set up a BA (Hons) Fine Art course, and have been for some time. We are actively developing this option with other partner colleges, with the aim to offer a Fine Arts degree in academic year 2016-17. Unfortunately it's not just up to us – new degree courses have to be developed and validated through the University of the Highlands and Islands, so it is unlikely that the course will be in place before 2016.

In regards to the petro-chemical industry, there are no courses planned as yet but this is perhaps an area which will be addressed by the ongoing Shetland Islands Council review of Tertiary Education.

- **Food needs to be a lot cheaper**
- **Prices at college are way too high, some students spending £7 a day**

Staff review prices every year, looking at comparable prices elsewhere in Shetland. They also research costs in other UHI colleges to make sure our prices are in line with theirs. Prices are at their current level because the cost of ingredients is high too. The college is certainly not making a profit from the canteen and we have no choice but to make it break even. There is very little waste in the canteen, and prices are really just covering costs.

There should be condoms in the male toilets as well as the female toilets. It is a 20th century, sexist idea to say "birth control is a woman's issue."

It also discriminates against our gay male students, who have just as much right to protection from STI as everyone else.

Thank you for bringing this to our attention. Senior Management are now addressing this issue, and we hope to install a condom machine in the male toilets soon.

'Who's daft idea was it to divide subjects into/over 2 days?! I now have to attend college 2 days for 1 higher and worse case scenario for next years' 2 highers? 4 days ☹️ I have children and I have to work part-time.

How about making your timetable a bit more like a college/uhi and less like school – for the grown-ups. Cheers.'

This year we trialled splitting Highers across two days because of feedback from students over the last couple of years. College staff are looking at the timetables again to decide how Highers would be best organised next year .

- **'We need a quiet door to the library.'**
- **'The door to the library closes very loudly and is often in constant use, which is a major distraction and not good whilst studying or reading. Needs muffling!'**

This feedback has been passed on to the building contractors for action.

I saw someone saying that the canteen is expensive, but the maet is so good I'd say it's value for money! Keep it up 😊

Thank you for this positive feedback. It's always a boost for our café staff!

'Especially at this time of year with bugs being rife, would it be possible to have keyboard and mouse wipes?'

This is a great suggestion considering flu is often going around. An order has been sent to Shetland Janitorial Supplies and wipes should be in all teaching spaces in the New Year.

Need signs for the mens' toilets

These are now in place.