



**Highlands & Islands**  
**ENTERPRISE**

**ATTITUDES TO LEARNING**  
**IN THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS**

**Shetland**  
**Research Report**

Prepared for : Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Prepared by : George Street Research Limited  
24 Broughton Street  
Edinburgh EH1 3RH  
Tel : 0131 478 7505  
Fax : 0131 478 7504  
E-mail : [info@george-street-research.co.uk](mailto:info@george-street-research.co.uk)

Sept 2002  
J3019

# **CONTENTS**

	<b>Page No</b>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
STUDY DETAILS	3
MAIN FINDINGS	5
Interest in learning	5
Importance of learning	6
Recent participation in learning	9
Methods of learning and influences to start learning	11
Future participation in learning	15
CONCLUSIONS	19

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In 2002 Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) conducted a study on attitudes to learning in the HIE area. Overall 200 interviews were completed in the Shetland area over the period March – April 2002.

Key results were;

- Very high proportions were either very or fairly interested in taking part in both taught (64%) and, especially, non-taught (76%) learning within the next year. This compared favourably with the interest seen across the HIE area (45% and 38% respectively).
- Learning was seen as important by the vast majority of the Shetland sample (92% versus 83% across the HIE area).
- A particularly large number of reasons were given by respondents as to why they felt learning was important. Both job and personal growth related statements were mentioned at higher levels than in the wider HIE area.
- Respondents in Shetland are more likely than those across the HIE area to hold particular qualifications (81% versus 74%). They are particularly likely to have reached standard grade level but no further (28% versus 19%), although a slightly higher proportion have degrees (19% versus 16%) and fewer reached Higher level but no further (24% versus 29%).
- Participation in both full-time (38% versus 31% in the HIE area) and, especially, part-time (47% versus 27%) post-school education or training was at high levels.
- A wide range of ways of learning were popular, with doing practical things (53%) and self-study (47%) the most popular.
- There were also a large number of popular channels for learning, with traditional mechanisms, namely books (63%) and lectures (44%) being

most favoured. More modern and technological means of learning were noted frequently, with the Internet/e-mail being stated by 34% of the sample.

- Colleges were the most popular sources of advice about learning opportunities, although work contacts and personal recommendations were also favoured.
- There was very high claimed likely future participation in both forms of learning. Taught learning (48% versus 35% in the HIE area) and non-taught learning (65% versus 30%) both had large numbers of respondents very or fairly likely to take part in them in the next year.
- There were signs that travel (27%) and finding convenient times (22%) were potential access problems in relation to taught learning, with 65% of all Shetland respondents likely to do taught learning (versus 53% across the HIE area) stating they would anticipate at least one potential access problem.
- There was also relatively high likely levels of participation in distance learning, with 34% of the sample very or fairly likely to take part in it during the next three years (versus 16% in the wider HIE area).
- Awareness of specific learning initiatives was particularly high for Skillseekers (85%), Modern Apprenticeships (72%) and Learndirect Scotland (66%), with all three initiatives having higher levels of awareness in Shetland than elsewhere in the HIE area. Awareness of Training for Work (48%) and New Deal (36%) was, however, notably lower in Shetland than the HIE area.

## **STUDY DETAILS**

### **Background**

Scottish Enterprise completed an initial survey on attitudes towards learning within the Scottish Enterprise area in 2001. Subsequently, HIE decided to conduct a similar study within the HIE area in 2002, covering many of the issues covered in the earlier study, but also adding local relevant topics.

### **Objectives**

Four specific objectives were noted for the HIE study:

- To identify the priority and importance placed on learning as an activity of choice or necessity;
- To measure levels of past and current participation and to gauge future intentions in relation to both taught and non-taught learning;
- To explore preferences and views regarding mediums/channels for learning and strategies for learning both in and away from the workplace including specifically the use of technology for learning; and,
- To ascertain current sources of advice used and preferred as well as awareness of different learning providers and specific initiatives.

### **Methodology**

2447 interviews were conducted across the 10 Local Enterprise Company areas in the HIE area, with each interview conducted as a face-to-face in-home interview. Of these, 200 interviews were conducted in the Shetland area. All interviews were conducted between 11<sup>th</sup> March and 30<sup>th</sup> April 2002. Sampling points were selected at random within each LEC area, with points chosen so that a representative spread was gained across each area and the HIE region. Specific quotas were set based on age, sex and working status,

based on the 1991 Census of Population for each area. Weighting was employed to ensure that the sample matched the demographic profile of each LEC and the HIE area as a whole.

### Demographic breakdown of sample

DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF TOTAL SAMPLE		
	Shetland	HIE
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	49%	48%
Female	51%	52%
<b>Age</b>		
16-34	36%	28%
35-54	35%	36%
55+	29%	36%
<b>SEG</b>		
ABC1	33%	36%
C2DE	67%	63%
<b>Working-status</b>		
Working	62%	56%
Not working	38%	44%
<i>Base: Total sample</i>	<i>(200)</i>	<i>(2447)</i>

The demographic profile of the sample in Shetland was markedly different from the overall sample in the HIE area, with more younger respondents within the sample and significantly more working respondents. Slightly more respondents were C2DE than seen in the overall population, with similar proportions of each gender. This demographic pattern is likely to have some effect on the analysis for the area, though it is important to bear in mind that this is only a function of the type of individuals already living upon the islands. A copy of the questionnaire used is appended to the main HIE area report.

## **MAIN FINDINGS**

### **A. INTEREST IN LEARNING**

Respondents were asked to state how interested they were in taught and non-taught learning using a five-point scale from very interested to not at all interested.

<b>INTEREST IN TAUGHT LEARNING IN NEXT YEAR</b>		
	<b>Shetland</b>	<b>HIE</b>
Very interested	35%	18%
Fairly interested	29%	27%
Not very interested	12%	13%
Not at all interested	22%	37%
Don't know	1%	6%
<i>Base:</i>	<i>(200)</i>	<i>(2447)</i>

Asked as a single-code question.

Respondents in Shetland are seen to have a high level of interest in taught learning when compared to the general HE sample. Over a third (35%) of Shetland respondents stated that they were very interested in participating in taught learning within the next year (versus 18% in the HIE area), with a further 29% being fairly interested. Indeed, interest in taught learning was higher in Shetland than in any other individual LEC within the Highlands and Islands Enterprise area.

<b>INTEREST IN NON-TAUGHT LEARNING IN NEXT YEAR</b>		
	<b>Shetland</b>	<b>HIE</b>
Very interested	39%	11%
Fairly interested	37%	27%
Not very interested	12%	16%
Not at all interested	10%	36%
Don't know	3%	10%
<i>Base:</i>	<i>(200)</i>	<i>(2447)</i>

Asked as a single-code question.

Interest in non-taught learning was also very high in Shetland, with 39% very interested and 37% fairly interested. Again, interest was higher than that in any other individual LEC area, as depicted by the lower average endorsement for the HIE area which was 11% very interested and 27% fairly interested.

## B. IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING

Having ascertained how interested respondents are in learning, it becomes important to understand respondents views of learning, how important they feel learning is, and why they feel learning is important or unimportant.

WAYS IN WHICH LEARNING COULD BE OF PERSONAL USE		
	Shetland	HIE
Helping achieve what I want	54%	37%
Satisfying personal interest	53%	37%
Personal development	52%	38%
Improving my job prospects	49%	40%
Improving my quality of life	43%	28%
Increasing self-confidence	41%	25%
Getting qualifications	37%	22%
Improving standard of living	36%	25%
Increasing salary	31%	17%
Improving job performance	27%	20%
Increasing work satisfaction	27%	19%
Provide opps to meet new people	27%	15%
Helping children with homework	26%	14%
Improving job position	24%	18%
None	6%	9%
<i>Base: Total sample</i>	<i>(200)</i>	<i>(2447)</i>

Asked as a multi-code question.

A high level of mentions was given to each potential way in which learning could be of personal use, suggesting a particularly positive view of learning in Shetland compared to the wider HIE area. Reasons were given that were largely based on personal growth or on jobs/careers. Helping achieve goals (54%), satisfying personal interest (53%) and personal development (52%) were the most noted reasons, all of which related to personal growth.

Improving quality of life (43%), increasing self-confidence (41%) and increasing standard of living (41%) were also highly mentioned. As stated, job-related reasons also came through strongly, with improving job prospects noted by almost half (49%) of Shetland respondents, with increasing salary (31%), improving job performance (27%) and improving job position (24%) also being mentioned.

<b>IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING</b>		
	Shetland	HIE
Very important	60%	56%
Quite important	32%	27%
Neither important or unimportant	4%	7%
Fairly unimportant	3%	5%
Very unimportant	-	4%
<i>Base</i>	<i>(200)</i>	<i>(2447)</i>

Asked as a single-code question.

Learning was felt to be important by the vast majority of respondents in Shetland, with 60% stating they saw it as very important and 32% as fairly important. This compared favourably with the already high levels of response in the HIE area, where 56% felt it to be very important and 27% to be fairly important.

The reasons why learning was seen as important generally followed the reasons why learning was felt to be of some personal use, with a mixture of job and personal growth related statements being mentioned. Improving job/career prospects was the option selected by the most respondents, being mentioned by 39% of all respondents, with enjoying learning new things (32%) the next most mentioned. Bettering yourself (27%), improving skills (27%), improving the quality of life (27%), learning as you can never learn enough (27%) and so as to learn new things (26%) were also mentioned as reasons by more than a quarter of the sample.

All respondents were shown a list of possible activities and asked to select from this list up to three activities which they enjoyed doing most. As respondents could choose no more than three separate options, the question shows the relative rather than the absolute enjoyment of each activity. Learning things was one of the less enjoyed activities in Shetland (18%), but was selected by more than across the HIE area as a whole (13%). The most enjoyed activities tended to be more social, with socialising with friends (56%) and spending time with friends (53%) being most favoured.

A number of attitudinal questions were asked to examine attitudes to learning in more depth. These again showed Shetland residents to be particularly positive towards learning.

- Exactly seven out of every ten respondents (70%) agreed strongly that you were more likely to get a job if you did some learning, training or education, compared to 58% in the HIE area.
- Almost half (47%) agreed strongly that taking part in life-long learning was important to them (versus 32% for the HIE area), again illustrating the importance of learning in the area.
- More similarity between Shetland residents and those in the HIE area was seen elsewhere with 34% in Shetland (versus 37% across the HIE area) agreeing strongly or tending to agree that it was more important to learn how to do a specific job than to acquire general skills. Almost half (49%) in Shetland either strongly disagreed or tended to disagree with this statement, suggesting a slight preference for learning general skills.
- There was also a preference for individuals not having to plan and pay for their own training, with 25% of respondents in Shetland agreeing strongly or tending to agree that they should take responsibility, but 45% disagreeing strongly or tending to disagree.

## C RECENT PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING

This section examines recent achievement or participation in learning, from existing qualifications to ascertaining the details of work-based programmes.

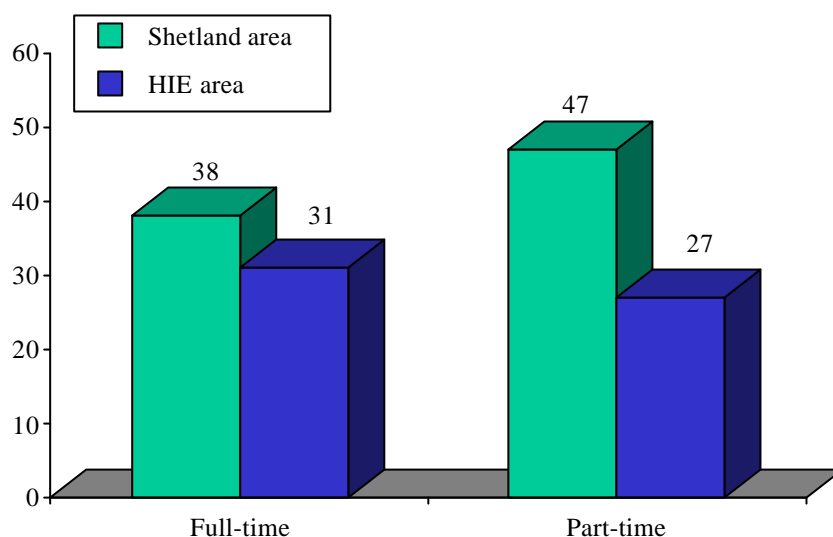
TOTAL QUALIFICATIONS GAINED		
	Shetland	HIE
None	19%	26%
Standard Grade or equivalent	28%	19%
Highers or equivalent	24%	29%
Degree/professional qualification or equivalent	19%	16%
<i>Base: Total sample</i>	<i>(200)</i>	<i>(2447)</i>

All other miscellaneous qualifications not included on table

Compared to the total HIE area figures, high levels of qualification had been gained within Shetland. Only 19% of respondents in Shetland (compared to 26% in the HIE area) claimed not to have achieved any of the stated qualifications, although as the pre-coded list did not include some older qualifications that were not mentioned subsequently by respondents as “others” this level of non-achievement may be overstated. Almost three in ten respondents in Shetland (28%) had achieved standard grades but no higher (versus 19% across the HIE area) and 24% had gone on to reach Higher level but no further (versus 29%). Encouragingly, almost a fifth (19% versus 16%) were awarded degrees or equivalent qualifications.

## Post-school participation in education/training

---



As seen, a high proportion of respondents in Shetland had gone on to take part in full or part-time training or education after leaving school. Almost half (47%) of the sample in Shetland participated in part-time training or education (versus 27% in the HIE area), with 38% (versus 31%) taking part in full-time training.

When shown a list of forms of learning, 59% of respondents in Shetland (versus 41% in the HIE area) claimed to have taken part in at least one of the forms in the last year, with 67% (versus 49% in the HIE area) having done so in the last three years. Improving skills/knowledge without a taught course was the most popular option (36% within the last year), with keeping up-to-date with work developments (32%) and supervised on-the-job training (25%) mentioned at lower levels. Exactly one in ten respondents stated they had studied for a qualification but not in a taught course. Over three-quarters (77%) of those who had been involved in learning in the last year did so in relation to their job or career, with 39% having learnt through their own interests and 5% in relation to voluntary work.

A battery of attitudinal questions was asked of all working respondents in order to examine further issues relating to learning and work. Almost all respondents in Shetland (97%) either agreed strongly or tended to agree that employers should give careers advice, with 68% agreeing strongly (versus 54% in the HIE area). A small minority of respondents (53%) either agreed strongly or tended to agree that there were enough opportunities for them to learn new things at their work, although 39% of respondents tended to disagree or strongly disagreed. There was a general positive feeling, however, towards learning centres, with 62% of respondents in Shetland either agreeing strongly or tending to agree that they would find time to use a work based learning centre if it would help them to do their job properly. Exactly a fifth of respondents tended to disagree or disagreed strongly with the statement.

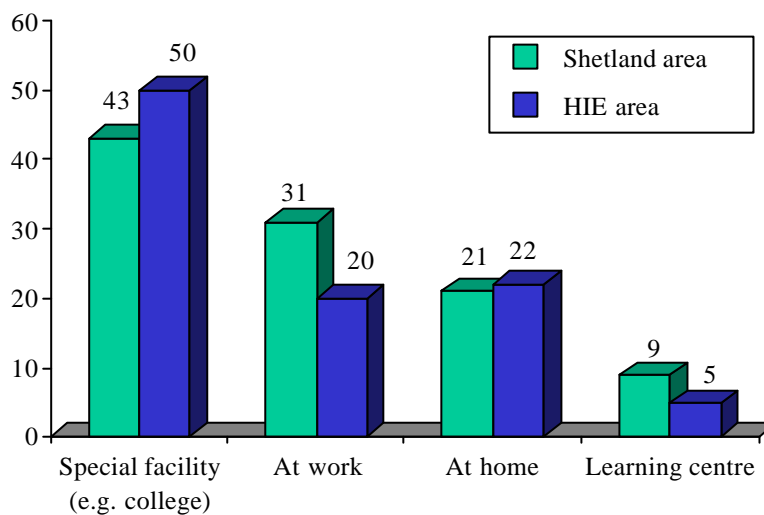
A wide variety of different methods of learning that could improve work performance were noted in Shetland, with the level of mentions for each option considerably above those given in the HIE area. Taught courses in work time to improve job performance (69%) was the most popular option, with trial and error (54%), watching others do the job (53%) and informal advice from a boss or colleagues (51%) also noted by more than half the sample.

## **D METHODS OF LEARNING AND INFLUENCES TO START LEARNING**

With modern advances in learning methods, it has become possible not only to learn in a variety of new ways, but for messages about the benefits of learning to be communicated in different ways. This section of the report aims to evaluate in what ways people want to learn, and the factors that persuade people to learn.

The most popular means of learning among the whole Shetland sample was by doing practical things (53%), an option that was particularly popular in comparison to the level of mentions for it across the HIE area (37%). Self-study (47%), being tutored as part of a group (40%), practising on your own (23%) and watching demonstrations (23%) were the next most popular means of learning. A small number of ways of learning were mentioned by fewer than one in five respondents, namely exchanging ideas (19%), one-to-ones with a tutor (18%), thinking for yourself (14%) and group activities (13%).

### Type of facility most suited to learning in



Just over two fifths of the Shetland respondents (43%) felt best suited to learning in a specialist facility, such as a training centre or college, with 31% (versus 20% in the HIE area) preferring to learn at work. Just over a fifth (21%) favoured learning at home, with a very small minority (9%) suggesting learning at a learning centre.

All respondents were asked to state which potential learning mechanisms they used regularly, with claimed use again being higher for all options in

Shetland than in the HIE area. TV (71%) and books (68%) were the most regularly used, with high use also for educational TV (54%), the Internet/e-mail (44%) and the radio (42%). High use was also claimed for digital TV (41%) although this is likely to be considerably overstated given existing confusion between satellite and digital TV. Use of reference books (37%), CD ROMs (28%) and libraries (27%) were all lower, although still above the proportion of mentions given in the HIE area.

Books were also Shetland respondents' favourite means of learning something new, being mentioned by 63% of respondents. Nearly half (44%) of respondents favoured learning through lectures/classes, with 34% selecting the Internet/e-mail and 31% videos as appropriate channels. CD ROMs (24%) and TV programmes (22%) were stated at lower levels, although still above the levels seen in the HIE area.

Attitudes to technology were established by means of a battery of attitudinal statements, with respondents in Shetland being generally positive. Exactly three-quarters of all Shetland respondents either agreed strongly or tended to agree that technological advances were making learning easier, with 70% agreeing strongly or tending to agree that they made learning more enjoyable. There was a strong desire also to learn more about computers, with 46% agreeing strongly (versus 25% in the HIE area) and 26% tending to agree that it was important that they learned more about computers.

A number of questions were asked requiring respondents to detail potential influences that would persuade them to take part in learning:

- "Myself" (31%) was the most popular personal influence, although as this had to be noted as an "other" option this level of mentions may be understated. Personal contacts were particularly influential in Shetland,

with friends/peers (28% versus 20% in the HIE area), spouse/partner (24%), parents/relatives (19%) and children (11%) all being noted.

- Influence also came from job contacts, with employers (16%) and work colleagues (13%) stated by a number of respondents.
- Information/adverts in local papers (32%) was the main promotional influence for respondents, with careers guidance (25%) and information/adverts from local colleges (22%) also highly stated. Information/adverts on TV (17%), from the library (13%) and Learndirect Scotland (9%) were also mentioned, with all the noted options being more popular in Shetland than across the HIE area.
- Colleges/institutes (32%) were popular if respondents were explicitly seeking advice. Libraries (18%), careers guidance (17%) and job centres (9%) were the other institutional sources of advice mentioned. Personal contacts were also felt to be good sources, with 24% of respondents mentioning friends or relatives, 13% colleagues and 10% employers.

Awareness and knowledge of a number of recent initiatives designed to increase or facilitate learning was also asked:

<b>AWARENESS OF LEARNING INITIATIVES</b>		
	Shetland	HIE
Skillseekers	85%	73%
Modern apprenticeships	72%	66%
Learndirect Scotland	66%	60%
Learning centres	58%	56%
University of the Highlands & Islands	56%	56%
Investors in people	52%	47%
Training for work	48%	53%
Careers Scotland	42%	40%
New Deal	36%	46%
Adult Learner Week	27%	31%
Individual Learning Accounts	27%	23%
New Futures	7%	14%
Learning Towns	5%	8%
<i>Base: Total sample</i>	<i>(200)</i>	<i>(2447)</i>

Asked as a single-code question.

Awareness was particularly high for three initiatives, Skillseekers (85% versus 73% in the HIE area), Modern Apprenticeships (72% versus 66%) and Learndirect Scotland (66% versus 60%), all of which had higher awareness in Shetland than in the HIE area. Just over half the sample were aware of a number of other initiatives, namely Learning Centres (58%), the University of the Highlands & Islands (56%) and Investors in People (52%). Lower awareness was seen for Training for Work (48%), Careers Scotland (42%) and New Deal (36%), with awareness for New Deal notably lower in Shetland than across the HIE area (46%).

The number of respondents stating they knew something about each initiative generally followed the same pattern for awareness, with the initiatives with the greatest levels of awareness being those that the most respondents knew something about. Skillseekers (53%) and Modern Apprenticeships (49%) had the highest level of knowledge, although it is noticeable that the high awareness of Learndirect Scotland did not convert well into knowledge, with only 30% of respondents claiming to know something about it.

## E FUTURE PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING

A number of questions were used to gauge future intentions about learning.

LIKELIHOOD TO PARTICIPATE IN LEARNING IN NEXT 12 MONTHS/THREE YEARS				
	Taught		Non-taught	
	Shetland	HIE	Shetland	HIE
Very/fairly likely in next year	48%	35%	65%	30%
Very/fairly likely in next three years	13%	7%	8%	3%
Not likely/not at all likely in next 3 years	35%	51%	21%	53%
<i>Base: Total sample</i>	<i>(200)</i>	<i>(2447)</i>	<i>(200)</i>	<i>(2447)</i>

Responses shown as single-code options.

Across Shetland the interest in participating in taught and non-taught learning has translated well into actual likelihood to participate, with 48% stating they are likely to take part in taught learning in the next year, and 65% saying they are likely to participate in non-taught learning in the next year. These figures are higher than those across the HIE area as a whole, where 35% are likely to take part in taught learning in the next year, and 30% likely to participate in non-taught learning within the same time scale.

The most popular course to take as both a taught and non-taught option in Shetland was information technology (IT) (30% and 22%), with a large range of other subjects being noted. Nursing/medical courses (12%) were popular as a taught learning course, as were arts and crafts (10%), science (7%), social work (6%) and languages (5%).

Taught courses in work-time to improve job performance (47%) was the most popular form of taught learning amongst respondents, with teaching yourself about the job outside work (29%) less popular. Courses about non-work related subjects were more popular when taking place outside work time (36%) than in work-time (15%). Trial and error (25%) and watching others do the job (24%) were more popular in Shetland than in the HIE area generally (11% and 7% respectively), with informal advice from colleagues/manager (16%) being the least stated option.

Questions were also asked to ascertain potential problems in learning, and the reasons why respondents were unlikely to take part in learning.

- 65% of Shetland respondents likely to take part in taught learning perceived there being potential access problems, more than mentioned problems across the HIE area (53%). Travel to the venue (27% versus 16% in the HIE area), finding convenient times (22% versus 15%) and cost

(19%) were the main issues noted. Childcare (14%) and finding the right course (10%) were also mentioned as issues.

- Due to the small base size, it was not possible to identify potential access problems for non-taught learning. HIE area data suggested there were less access problems relating to this form of learning (37%) than taught learning (53%). The major potential problems noted across the HIE area were cost (15%), childcare (9%) and finding convenient times (8%).
- The reasons for being unlikely to take part in taught learning generally matched those given for non-taught learning. A lack of enthusiasm was the main issue, with respondents stating they were not interested (16% for taught, 18% for non-taught), felt they knew all they need to know (9% for both taught and non-taught learning), couldn't be bothered (8% and 4%) and were not inspired (4% for both taught and non-taught learning). Other issues were difficulties in finding the time (27% and 26%), cost (28% and 18%, particularly higher than the 12% and 7% in the HIE area) and the lack of relevant courses (13% and 6%).

<b>LIKELIHOOD TO TAKE PART IN DISTANCE LEARNING IN THE NEXT 3 YEARS</b>		
	Shetland	HIE
Very likely	14%	5%
Fairly likely	20%	11%
Not very likely	17%	20%
Not at all likely	42%	49%
Don't know	6%	15%
Base	(200)	(2447)

Asked as a single-code question.

As well as the high likely participation in taught and non-taught learning, 34% of respondents in Shetland stated that they were either very or fairly likely to take part in distance learning in the next three years. Not only is this level of endorsement considerably higher than the endorsement in the HIE area (16%), it is also the highest seen in any of the individual LEC's.

Due to the low base size among Shetland respondents the reasons for being likely or unlikely to take part in distance learning have only been reported among the HIE sample. Analysis of the HIE results showed that those respondents who were likely to take part in distance learning gave a wide variety of reasons for their interest. In total, 13% stated it was as they were already interested in learning, 7% as they were already doing home study, 7% for work-related reasons, and 6% as it was convenient. It is encouraging that 5% gave the fact that technology makes it possible as a reason, with 5% also mentioning the need to gain qualifications. Reasons for being unlikely to take part in distance learning focussed again upon lack of interest (16%), with lack of time (15%) and age (11%) being the only other comments made by more than 5% of the sample.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Results for Shetland were generally more positive than for any other LEC, with respondents already seeing the benefits and advantages of learning.

Very high levels of interest and likely participation were seen for both taught and, especially, non-taught learning within the area. Also, there is little need to illustrate the importance of learning in the area – this is accepted by the vast majority, who see learning as important for reasons relating to both their own personal growth and their careers.

Reflecting all of the above, higher levels of participation were seen in Shetland than across the HIE area in both part-time and full-time post-school training/education. Participation in Shetland was higher for the part-time variety than for full-time, a pattern not generally seen across the HIE area. Results also showed a high level of respondents having achieved qualifications, although a larger than expected number of respondents achieved standard grade level but no further.

A wide range of means of learning were favoured, with a large number of popular channels for learning also stated, suggesting that a range of different means and methods of learning should be provided. Technological means of learning are also important, with the Internet/e-mail being the third most popular means of learning. The importance of technological learning is shown further by the high percentage of respondents interested in distance learning, a form of learning which could counter some of the potential access problems identified by islanders.