

**Shetland LEF Skills Sub Group**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Skills Survey**

**Hospitality, Tourism and Service Sector**

**Service Delivery and Skills Gaps**

## **DOCUMENT INFORMATION**

Document Title: Skills Survey – Hospitality, Tourism and Service Sector  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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There appears to be a lack of a service tradition in Shetland related to a history of self-reliance. Participants identified the lack of a major strategy to address the needs of the sector.

Participants in the qualitative research often viewed good service as being a matter of personality and common sense, and not necessarily as something which needed specific training or careful management.

The business questionnaires revealed that people appreciated that service was an important part of their business, but it revealed a negative view of how both visitors and locals were served in Shetland. Training was regarded as important, but many organisations neither found it worthwhile or viable.

Existing courses were not always appropriate or flexible enough for organisations.

The research revealed that Customer Service was viewed very much as a “front of house” issue and that owners and managers did not really see it as a strategic imperative.

The low opinions about careers and jobs in the service sector among Shetland residents were translated, especially in the accommodation providers, into a lack of willingness to invest in training and quality service.

Key organisational gaps emerged in:

- management,
- staff development,
- strategic planning,
- relationship management.

Personal skills gaps among the labour force emerged in customer care.

In entry-level jobs there was little commitment to training because the jobs were perceived as seasonal and the workforce was perceived as uncommitted.

The public questionnaires identified that visitors to Shetland actually had a higher opinion of service levels than the local residents did. Local residents held the sector in low regard, both as customers and as potential employees.

In general, the sector was regarded in a negative light. This was so evident, that it is clear that improvements in quality and customer service will not come from training staff alone. The Shetland Local Economic Forum will have to invest in improving the image of the sector among both businesses and local residents for any longer term improvements to have a chance of bedding in.

Members of the public associate “service” very closely with the range of products and facilities on offer, as well as with their one-to-one experience with members of staff. The businesses and organisations in Shetland are perceived as not being customer orientated in their total service provision.

We believe that positive publicity, communication of good news and communication about the importance of tourism to businesses and individuals will be required before people will spend time and money in improving customer service. In a more positive environment, training of frontline staff will have a far greater chance of success.

The biggest gaps exist in the attitude of management and owners towards both customer service and training. Unless they can be persuaded of the financial and performance merits of good service, no amount of training courses offered to their staff will make a significant difference. If they can make their businesses customer orientated, then there is a training need in service and attitude, and most importantly this training needs to be continuous.

However, the sector needs people who are prepared to work for relatively low wages at entry level. Once in work, they need training and mentoring to improve performance and to broaden their abilities. Our experience is that this is a problem, not just in Shetland but in much of Europe.

The financial situation facing many business owners means that this is unlikely to change. Unless owners and managers can be persuaded of the financial benefits of investing in staff, then the sector will not make the investments in time or money.

Recommendations to remedy the situation include:-

- Publication of the results of this study
- Local media and events to disseminate survey results
- Careers packs for local schools
- Mentoring programme for local businesses
- Shetland Standard accreditation for local businesses