

Committee	UHI North, West and Hebrides: Board of Management
Subject	Highlands and Islands Students' Association Update
Action requested	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> For information only <input type="checkbox"/> For discussion <input type="checkbox"/> For recommendation <input type="checkbox"/> For endorsement <input type="checkbox"/> For approval
Summary of the paper	This paper provides an update on the recent developments and activity relating to the Students' association.
Resource implications	N/A
Risk implications	N/A
Date paper prepared	03/03/2025 (updated Elections section added 21/03/2025)
Date of Board / Committee meeting	26/03/2025 Board of Management
Author	Caroline Macpherson (HISA Development Manager), and HISA heads of departments.
Link with strategy Please highlight how the paper links to the Strategic Plan	The Code of Good Governance states that the Board must have close regard to the voice of its students and the quality of the student experience should be central to all Board decisions.
Island communities	
Status (e.g., confidential, non-confidential)	Non-confidential
Freedom of information	
Consultation How has consultation with partners been conducted?	The Students' Association regularly consults students and listens to their concerns.

Recommendation –



Highlands and Islands Students' Association Update March 2025

Executive Committee Updates

Led by members of the 23/24 Executive, UHI and HISA have now agreed a refreshed Student Mental Health Agreement which can be found at: [Student Mental Health Agreement](#). Along with this the HISA Executive Committee will be led on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Campaign 'Feel Fab Feb' throughout the month of February. The campaign included On-Campus Events like wellbeing workshops, mindfulness sessions, fayres where students can engage with local charities, and therapets. Online activities included mental health talks, interactive sessions with experts, and online trivia. The North, West and Hebrides Depute President and local HISA team organised a successful online yoga session. Advocacy and lobbying where HISA will push for stronger mental health support across the nation, ensuring student wellbeing funding is a top priority for decision-makers.

Student Voice Representation Update

HISA have over 500 registered SVRs across all UHI partners. We currently have 48 Student Voice Reps registered within UHI North, West and Hebrides with almost 50 percent of these SVRs having attended training.

SVR monthly meetings have been well attended this academic year so far and SVRs who cannot attend meetings have been utilising our feedback form to provide us with much needed feedback relating to the student experience and quality standards. Our local HISA staff attend in-person classes of students attending at levels 1-3, to gather their feedback and allow these students a bespoke method to raise concerns and have their voices heard.

We aim to align conversations and outcomes with quality processes within APs and regionally, informing key activities such as Self-Evaluation and Action Plans (SEAPs) and end of year course reviews. Relatedly, HISA staff and officers have been engaged in preparation of SEAPs reflecting on the past academic year, contributing information about activities in student engagement in quality.

The SVRs have raised several key concerns this year with several groups of students experiencing similar concerns across locations and subject areas. These concerns are communicated with key college staff including the executive leadership team, student service and engagement team, and estates team, where solutions can be sought. Some of the key issues raised this semester include:



- Concerns over hygiene of café at Fort William. More students opting to get food from local garage resulting in increased rubbish and debris at campus.
- Students have raised concerns over the loss of free tea, coffee and breakfasts that had been available in previous years.
- Lack of suitable facilities on campus for students to securely store and prepare their own food. Items are removed by others despite items being clearly labelled.
- A need for more disabled parking spaces with safe paths between car park and building at Thurso and Fort William campuses.
- Communal areas on campuses are not ideal for wheelchair access.
- A need for more practical experience for the hair and beauty students. Of their 3-day week, only one day is open salon, an additional day for more experience would be ideal.
- Uncertainty around who to contact for general academic advice with the absence of LDWs/PATs at FE level. Students not aware of who their key course contacts are.
- Requests for smoking shelters, as spaces where students congregate to smoke are small, damaged and fire risks.

All the above issues/concerns have been passed to appropriate staff and individuals who can offer advice and guidance. These issues/concerns have since been rectified or are in the process of being dealt with.

HISA Elections 2025

Our Student Elections came to a close on Friday 14th March with the announcement of the winners. Nominations for our annual Student Elections were open from December 24 until 12pm on Thursday 20th February and voting was open for all UHI students to vote for the executive team of student officers for AY 2025/2026 between 10th and 13th March. The results from the positions that SAMS students were eligible to vote for are:

- Cross-campus President – Xander McDade
- Cross-campus Vice President Education – Holly Pearce
- North, West & Hebrides Depute President (Islands) – Alasdair MacLeod
- North, West & Hebrides Depute President (North) – Cole Garscadden
- North, West & Hebrides Depute President (West) – Abigail Teague

A total of 946 members voted (4.17%), casting 2,984 individual votes. This represents an increase in turnout by around 54.32% compared to the 2024 Officer Elections. Specific stats relating to UHI North, West & Hebrides student participation will be made available to boards during the next board cycle.

The newly elected executive team will begin their roles on the 1st of August 2025. The current local depute will remain in position until the 31st of May.



Clubs and Societies Updates

We currently have 25 societies, 26 sports clubs, and 7 networks- with a total membership of around 900. Our most active online groups are the Pride Network and the Gaming Society. We have been working with faculty at various colleges to try get students interested in academic societies. We will be launching the Term 2 grant in mid-January. We are also working through new policies to reflect changes in PVG schemes. We continue to build up our directory of community opportunities.

We are currently looking for help in transporting students to sporting events, as that is our single biggest barrier to student participation. We've been looking ahead to next semester and have booked Inverness Leisure Centre for UHI Varsity, one of our biggest events on the sports calendar which will take place on 1st April. We've started preparations to defend our Shinty title at the Littlejohn Vase.

Equality, Diversity, Inclusion

HISA's EDI committee has launched 4 campaigns so far in semester two:

January saw Islamophobia Awareness Month, Transgender Awareness Week, and 16 Days of Activism to end GBV. These campaigns consist of social media and website information, as well as in-person activity at a variety of colleges and in collaboration with our different clubs and societies. We attended vigils for Trans Remembrance Day and Reclaim the Night Marches. For the 16 days, we have been collaborating with UHI to promote the new disclosure tool and EmilyTest survey, and we also have white ribbon pledges at different campuses.

February seen a month-long awareness campaign for LGBTQ+ History Month—a time to honour the resilience of those who fought for LGBTQ+ rights, reflect on the progress made, and celebrate the rich history and contributions of LGBTQ+ individuals in society.

Upcoming for March, focus will be on raising awareness of Neurodiversity and celebrating International Women's Day. In the coming months we will be undertaking some internal work for the new prevention of sexual harassment duties and for inclusive communication

Board of Management Updates

We will be commencing evaluation of the Board of Management Project with key stakeholders within boards and academic partners. Planning for this will be done with our elected student officers and Governance Professionals across UHI and will cover



how successful support for student board members is within our organisations and further developments needed.

HISA Advice Service Update

The Advice Service has observed a substantial increase in student cases compared to previous years. This upward trend suggests a growing awareness of the service and greater student engagement with available support. A key contributing factor has been the proactive collaboration between Advice Service staff and UHI colleagues, particularly in the North, West and Hebrides, to provide targeted support for students encountering various challenges, including academic misconduct cases, formal complaints, and other welfare-related concerns.

As part of its ongoing efforts to strengthen institutional partnerships and enhance the student experience, the Advice Service has undertaken several initiatives in recent months:

- **January 2025:** The Advice Service delivered a presentation to Personal Academic Tutors (PATs) in Argyll. This session provided an overview of the service's remit, highlighted common student concerns, and explored opportunities for closer collaboration in supporting students more effectively. The discussion also identified potential areas for development in providing student support.
- **February 2025:** A tailored training session was conducted for Highlands and Islands Students' Association (HISA) local staff, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to effectively triage student issues and refer cases to the Advice Service as appropriate. This initiative aims to ensure a more streamlined and efficient support pathway for students seeking guidance and assistance.

In addition to these engagement activities, the Advice Service plays an active role in key UHI-wide committees, including the Safeguarding Committee, Student Support Group, and Hardship Funding Group. Through participation in these forums, the service ensures that student welfare, financial challenges, and safeguarding concerns remain central to institutional decision-making and policy development.

The Advice Service is also contributing to institutional policy development by participating in UHI working groups focused on Mitigating Circumstances and updating Academic Regulations. These contributions help shape policies that directly impact students, ensuring that their perspectives and challenges are considered in the development of fair and effective academic procedures.

These efforts reflect the Advice Service's commitment to fostering meaningful partnerships across the university and enhancing the overall student support framework. Further engagement activities and training opportunities will continue to be explored to ensure students receive timely and effective support in navigating their academic and personal challenges.