

<b>Committee</b>	UHI North, West and Hebrides: Learning, Teaching & Research Committee
<b>Subject</b>	Students' Association Update
<b>Action requested</b>	<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
<b>Summary of the paper</b>	This paper provides an update on the recent developments and activity relating to the Students' association.
<b>Resource implications</b>	N/A
<b>Risk implications</b>	N/A
<b>Date paper prepared</b>	12/08/2024
<b>Date of Board / Committee meeting</b>	20/09/2024 Learning, Teaching & Research Committee Meeting
<b>Author</b>	Caroline Macpherson (HISA Development Manager), and HISA heads of departments.
<b>Link with strategy</b> 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.
<b>Island communities</b>	
<b>Status</b> (e.g., confidential, non-confidential)	Non-confidential
<b>Freedom of information</b>	
<b>Consultation</b> How has consultation with partners been conducted?	The Students' Association regularly consults students and listens to their concerns.

**Recommendation –**

# Students' Association Update

## August 2024

### Executive Committee Updates

All bar 4 of our elected officer posts are now filled and clear plans are in place to co-opt students to the remaining places in early September to ensure AP Boards have representation from as early in the academic year as possible. Those officers already in post have received and continue to receive a revised training package covering Boards of Management, governance, PR, comms, events and campaigns, amongst many other things. In addition, officers are being supported this year to create goals and SMART objectives which will help them and HISA track their delivery and enable clear reporting to Boards. It will also help the officers to articulate their impact for future career and CV purposes.

The Executive team has been proactive in responding to current events and planning future campaigns. They released a statement, in coordination with other Students' Associations and Unions across the UK and the National Union of Students, condemning the right-wing riots occurring throughout the country with a list of actions and calls to the government to protect vulnerable minority groups. Looking ahead, the Executive has begun to strategically plan cross-campus campaigns for the academic year, including a wellbeing and mental health campaign. Additionally, Inverness Depute President Holly, with the support of the Executive has been working on the Network Student Project, which aims to improve engagement with students who are not based on campus or whose courses are delivered entirely online.

### Local Officer Updates

As of the 1st of August, Nicolas Koawlczuk has officially taken up the position of the newest officer for the North, West, and Hebrides region.

Nicolas has completed our officer training program (in-person in Inverness and online), where he gained deeper insights into his new role and began working as part of the executive team (cross-campus officers and officers from all UHI academic partners).

Several introductory meetings with key stakeholders he will collaborate with throughout the year, such as the Principal, Student Services teams, and the Board Chair, have been organised throughout August and early September.

In the coming weeks, we will work closely with Nicolas to break down his manifesto goals into SMART objectives and plans made on how to effectively achieve these. The progress made on his objective tracker will be communicated in the

Our team has organised Freshers' Fayres across several campuses in North, West, and Hebrides. These events will provide new and returning students with opportunities to find out about the wide range of support services available both on and off campus, as well as discover activities they can engage in beyond their studies.

The Freshers' Fayres will also allow us to introduce HISA and its mission early in the academic year, helping students to familiarize themselves with the roles of Student Voice Representatives (SVRs) and Officers. By doing so, we aim to encourage student involvement in these important roles from the start. HISA Freshers will include more online aspects for our students without access to a campus.

In addition to the Fayres, we are hosting various HISA induction sessions online. These sessions will offer a more personal way for us to connect with students, introducing them to who we are as an organisation and how we can support them throughout their academic journey.

## **Student Voice Rep Updates**

Significant improvements to the SVR (Student Voice Rep) system has been undertaken over the summer, including work with staff to better promote the role within APs, development of our data policy around SVRs, and work with EO and others, including through the UHI Student Voice Rep Group which includes relevant Academic Partner staff, to develop approaches to training and engagement of SVRs throughout the year.

In particular, the use of sparqs' [SLE model Reflective Questions](#) will be critical to meaningful conversations between SVRs and staff and will be rooted in the training. Our priority this year is to ensure a richer impact at programme and Academic Partner level so students can truly be partners in shaping their learning. Our ability to gather information by campus, AP, subject area and regionally means we can build clear pictures of students' ideas and suggestions for enhancement.

## **Clubs and Societies Updates**

We are delighted to report that the AY 23/24 saw a large increase of student groups and membership, with membership sitting around the 800 mark. This growth, alongside our dedicated efforts to support transition processes, means we are beginning the AY 24/25 with more active student groups than ever before. We are beginning the year with 19 societies, 23 sports clubs, and 7 networks. We estimate that we have about 700 returning members for this year. These numbers will continue to grow, as we engage in new approaches to supporting students to start groups and promoting what we already have. In addition to our work on expanding engagement, we are also launching a directory of opportunities for students to volunteer and/or find recreation out in their local communities.

## **Board of Management Updates**

Work has continued to develop resources related to the organisation's Board of Management Project. Officers have received extensive internal training and will attend College Development Network's Student Board Member Induction training in September. Work is also underway to create resources for Boards to explain HISA as an organisation to provide better insight and understanding into our work and the work of our elected student officers.

## **Other Key Updates**

### **Advice Service**

The Advice Service returns for another year in anticipation to support more UHI students, especially that Housing has been added to the key areas of support. The service's caseworker has achieved a housing qualification offered by Shelter Scotland, Housing Law Advice – Casework, and can now support students with their housing problems and aid them in realising their rights. Further guidance will be freely available to students via the student association's website in the first instance and specialist support if required.

The service is also working in partnership with Strathclyde Union, particularly their Advice Hub, to offer coverage of leave when needed so UHI students are not at a disadvantage and can still access support from a knowledge and leading source of support. In return, the service will offer support on their caseloads which will give our advisor further knowledge and experience of student matters.

### **Strategic Plan**

The new HISA strategy and set of KPIs are currently with HISA's new Executive for comment before further steps can be taken for formal approval by the HISA Trustee Board. As part of this work, we will begin a slow return to the name 'HISA' and a cost effective brand refresh, both subject to student approval.

### **Organisational Update**

In addition to the officers, HISA and UHI have now appointed a Subject Intern as part of a pilot approach within UHI's Cognate Subject Groups, thanks to part funding from UHI LTA's Scholarship Fund. This post will bring student expertise to subject area discussion in academic committees and various panels such as approvals, validations and internal quality processes. We will work with LTA and others to evaluate this pilot prior to considering an expansion in 25/26 and in the context of UHI's continuing developments. HISA has also appointed Paul Stalker as its new Insight and Democracy Officer who, among other responsibilities, will conduct a thorough review of our democratic and election processes, our articles and ordinances, and bring a fresh view to our election processes with the aim of significantly increasing our election turn out for the spring 2025 election round, as well as providing support to student officers through policy research.

The first draft of our HISA Impact Report for 23/24 has been written for scrutiny and approval by the HISA Trustee Board in late September. HISA has also approved a new Gaelic plan which it will work through with the support of UHI over the next few years and is also currently working on a revised Student Mental Health Agreement for hopeful approval and launch this autumn. And finally, HISA is working with EO on agreeing how HISA and the wider student body will be involved in the UHI Transformation programme as 24/25 progresses.

### **External engagement**

Complementing our work across UHI on strengthening student engagement in quality and governance, we are also engaging nationally in a number of forums to shape the learning experience. We are currently engaging in the Scottish Government's consultation on Post-School Education and Skills Reform and the QAA's consultation on the methodology for the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review, drawing on HISA's unique perspective as a tertiary students' association in a federal institution with a diverse curriculum and student profile.