

Student Experience Strategy 2023 - 2028



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Introduction

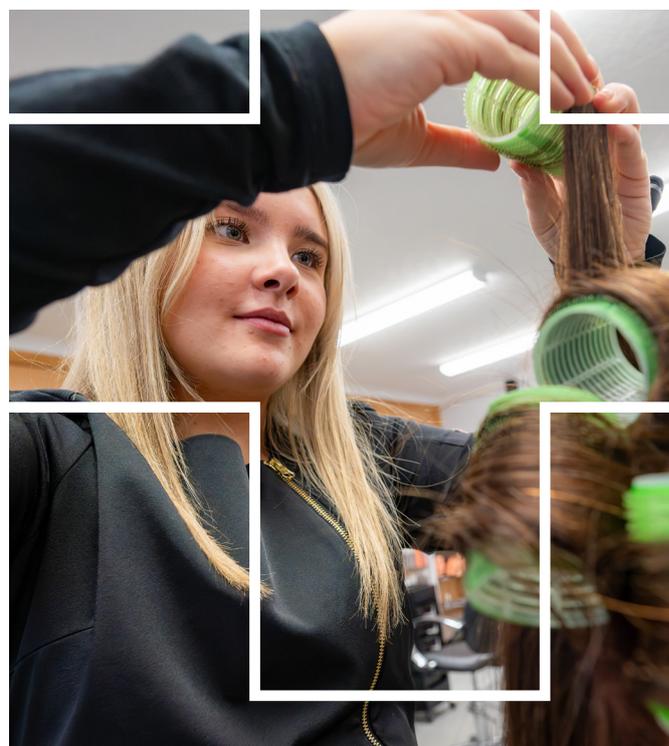
UHI North, West and Hebrides is Scotland's newest college, formed in August 2023 following the merger of UHI North Highland, UHI Outer Hebrides and UHI West Highland.

Proudly rooted in the culture and landscapes of the North and West Highlands, Skye and Outer Hebrides, UHI North, West and Hebrides provides relevant and distinctive learning, skills, research and innovation, shaped by the needs and ambitions of our communities, with a reach that extends locally, nationally and internationally.

As one of the largest partners within the University of the Highlands and Islands, we deliver flexible, supportive lifelong learning, from access level to PhD, to suit more people, at more levels, for more reasons.

We serve a diverse population, from school leavers to working adults, from career changers to those entering the workforce.

Through our range of senior phase, further education and higher education courses, world-class research, and flexible place-based, work-based and online study options, we're widening access to education in our rural and island communities, removing barriers to learning, providing relevant progression and career pathways for our students, and creating a personalised experience tailored to their needs.



We're delivering learning, skills, research and innovation to support a talent pipeline for the region's key growth sectors including energy, engineering and construction, net zero and sustainability, creative industries, food and drink, health and social care, land and sea-based industries, and Gaelic.

As an anchor institution in the region, our aim is to have a transformative impact on the people, communities and economies of our regions, by providing opportunities that enable people to live, work and study in the North and West Highlands, Skye and Outer Hebrides.

Strategic framework

A three-year strategic framework was set out in our business case for merger.

+ Our vision

To be an anchor institution for the region – a connected, flexible and sustainable learning organisation, opening doors to a world of opportunities.

+ Our mission

To connect rural and island Scotland, pioneering distinctive education and research opportunities to enable our students and communities to shape their future in a changing world.

+ Our values

- + **Trust:** We take pride in our work and trusted by our students, staff and partners. We are recognised for our leadership and dedication to deliver more for everyone we serve.
- + **Integrity:** We take responsibility for our actions, ensuring transparency and accountability. People are at the heart of everything we do, and we operate in a culture of collaboration, openness, dignity and respect.
- + **Excellence:** We are ambitious for our learners, our staff, our college, and our communities. We drive innovation, aspire to be sector leaders, and measure our success against national and international benchmarks.

+ Our strategic goals

- + To become a financially sustainable joined-up organisation
- + To grow curriculum, particularly into key areas that link with our research and commercial opportunities
- + To grow research and knowledge exchange through connecting our current specialisms and developing them alongside our region's potential
- + To have cohesive and responsive business development teams who can respond effectively and purposefully to opportunities of scale
- + To enhance the student experience through connecting our sites, resources, communities, and multi-location programmes
- + To have resilient team structures and depth of resource to address changing priorities, opportunities, and economic difficulties.

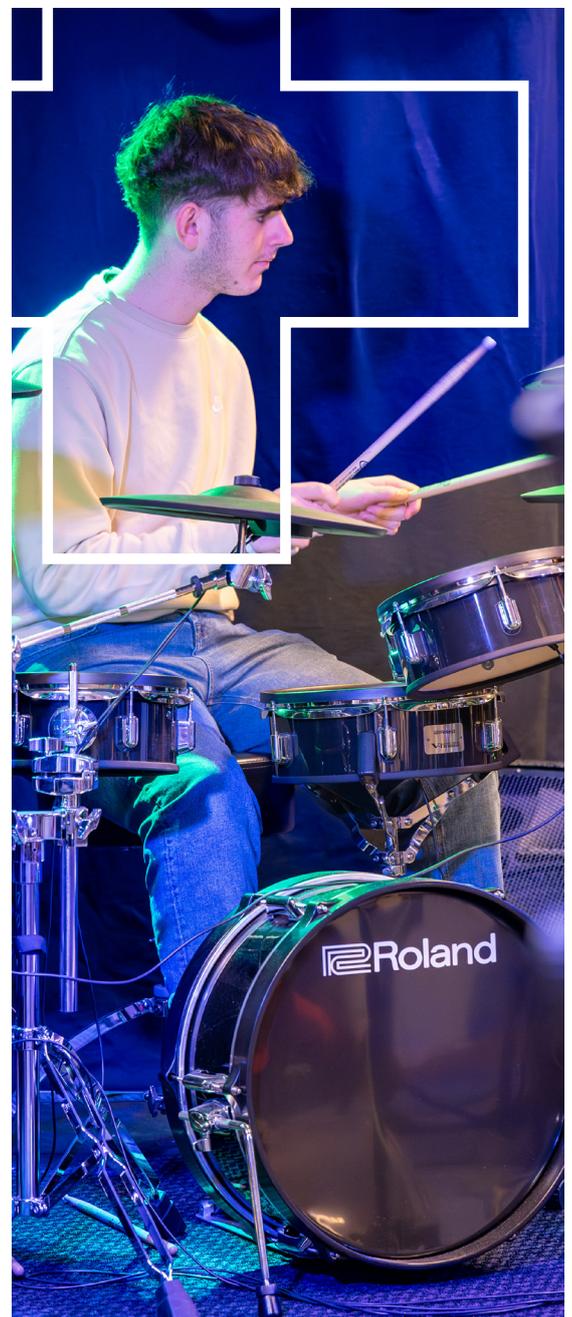
Student Experience Strategy: Introduction

This strategy defines student experience as including all activities that support student engagement and partnership. Working in partnership with our students, developing, maintaining and improving high-quality student experiences, is an integral activity at UHI North, West and Hebrides. Factors that impact student experience may change over time, and as such, our aims and objectives are enabling and dynamic to embrace change. This strategy will support and enhance the delivery of a ranges of services that contribute to a culture of student partnership, engagement, wellbeing and support throughout the student journey with the explicit aim of developing a high-quality student experience.

+ Purpose:

The student experience strategy sets out the strategic direction, commitments and actions UHI North, West and Hebrides will take to ensure that positive student experience is at the heart of the organisation. It will ensure that every student can fulfil their goals and thrive academically, individually and socially. This document will drive strategic and operational planning, and develop further our key partnerships, to enhance the student experience across all locations, modes, and levels of delivery. It has been created in consultation with:

- + NWH Student Services
- + NWH Curriculum
- + NWH Engagement leads
- + NWH Student Engagement Group
- + NWH HISA & Regional
- + NWH Operational Delivery Group Leads
- + NWH ASET Group
- + NWH Curriculum Managers
- + UHI Student Support
- + UHI Mental Health and Counselling Manager



+ Scope:

It is the responsibility of every staff member and department across the college to actively and positively contribute to our student experience, throughout the student journey.

Whilst our staff within the departments of curriculum and student experience will play critical roles in achievement of our aims and objectives, a whole college approach is required to achieve the highest standards of student experience.

The student experience strategy 2025-2028 is enabled by UHI North, West and Hebrides strategies and plans:

- + Tertiary curriculum strategy 2025-2028
- + Corporate parenting plan 2025-2028
- + Infrastructure strategy 2025 -2028
- + Research and knowledge exchange strategy 2025-2028

+ Context:

UHI North, West and Hebrides recognises that student engagement and support are essential to the development of effective and vibrant partnership with our students. Students are at the heart of everything we do. We strive to ensure that all students, regardless of mode of study or location, are an active part of our college community, receive equity of service, and have an influential voice within decision making and shaping the services we offer. These are key to enhancing student experience and developing a sense of community and belonging, wherever and how our students choose to study with us.

As partners, students will work alongside staff, committees and stakeholders to help shape learning, wider student experience and further develop the strategic direction of UHI North, West and Hebrides.



+ Strategic Relationships:

Supporting positive mental health and wellbeing

The Thriving Learners Study (Mental Health Foundation; 2022), was the largest study into mental health and wellbeing of college and university students in Scotland. It reported that 65% of college students and 74% of university students reported experiencing low mental health and wellbeing. The study also reported that 37% of college students and 22% of university students reported experience of food insecurity ([mental health foundation](#)).

The Student Mental Health Action Plan (Scottish Government; 2024) and its five actions are informed by Public Health Scotland's Three Levels of Prevention; Health promoting measures, Intervening early if a student is at risk of a particular outcome and Supporting students who have established mental health problems and conditions so that they do not deteriorate and are able to function at a good level throughout their academic journey ([Student mental health action plan](#)).

UHI North, West and Hebrides are committed to ensuring we deliver a holistic approach to student mental health and wellbeing, which encompasses both the provision of accessible services, timely interventions and referrals, and the creation of a culture that enables students and staff to maintain their mental health and wellbeing.

UHI North, West and Hebrides understands mental health and wellbeing impacts on all aspects of the student experience. We are committed to providing a range of support services in a compassionate and professional manner. These services do not attempt to replicate specialist NHS clinical mental health services or local authority social services. We are committed to promotion, awareness raising and referral to specialist services, where appropriate.

To enhance our student experience strategy 2025-2028, we adopt [UHI Partnership: Student Mental Health Strategy 2024-2027](#).

Corporate parenting

Our [Corporate Parenting Plan 2025-2028](#), identifies UHI North, West and Hebrides as a corporate parent under part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. We aim to create a culture to support the duties of a corporate parent under the legislation, by ensuring we have appropriately trained and qualified staff and by developing a commitment to shared values throughout our organisation. The college is committed to ensuring that care experienced young people are fully supported during their time with us, to enable them to successfully complete their course and to prepare them for the future. The whole organisation is responsible for fulfilling corporate parenting duties. Our student experience strategy aims and objectives are aligned with our corporate parenting plan actions.

Safeguarding

Our UHI North, West and Hebrides Safeguarding policy 2024, provides a unified approach to safeguarding across the UHI partnership and ensures parity of student experience. The policy supports UHI North, West and Hebrides commitment to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for all. It also supports us to ensure that we meet legislative requirements on safeguarding and discharge our duty of care in support of a positive student experience.

Sparqs (student partnerships in quality Scotland) - Engagement and partnership

Our strategic aims and objectives are focused clearly on the key elements of the Student Engagement Framework for Scotland (sparqs; 2011).

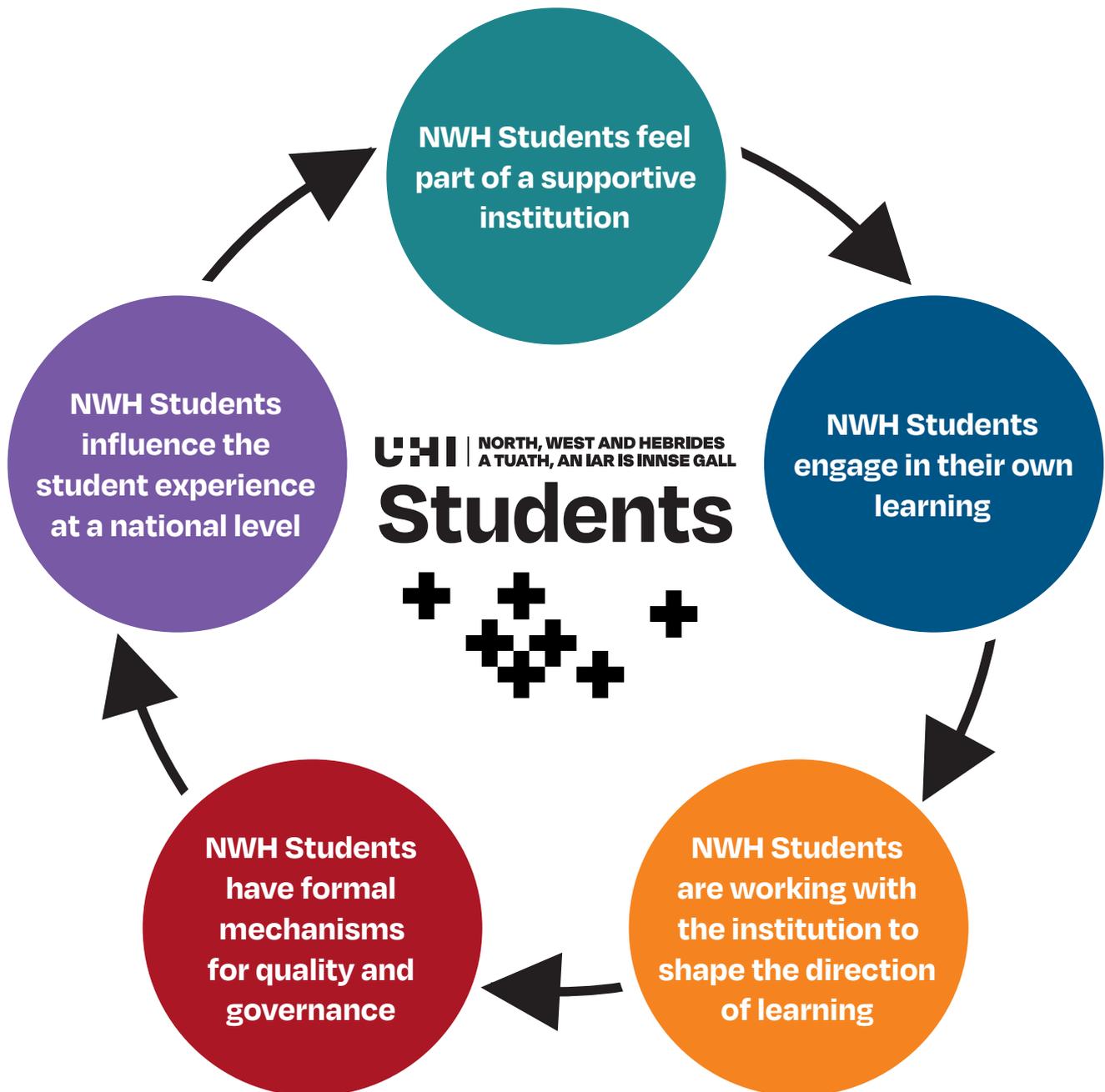


Figure 1: Based on the five key elements of student engagement (sparqs; 2011).

Within this strategy, the term student experience refers to a wide range of activities and approaches, as defined by sparqs in [Scotland's ambition for student partnership \(2024\)](#), and [A student engagement framework for Scotland \(2011\)](#), as including engagement and partnership working.

Highlands and Islands Student Association (HISA) Partnership

Our operational action plan is a live document that supports the student experience strategy and has been co-created, and will be monitored and evaluated, with HISA every semester. This process is aligned with the UHI North, West and Hebrides and Highlands and Islands Student's Association memorandum of understanding (MoU).

Scotland's tertiary quality enhancement framework (TQEF)

Scotland's TQEF includes four underpinning principles that all impact student experience. These principles impact across several key enabling college strategies. Central to this strategy, is "student engagement and partnership". Through this principle, the framework ensures students are partners in their learning experience, are at the centre of review and enhancement activities, the student voice is impactful at all levels and locations, student representation is effective and robust, and the organisation is responsive to student feedback. Further detail on TQEF can be found within the following document: [SFC guidance on quality for colleges and universities AY2024-25 to AY2023-31](#).

UHI North, West and Hebrides ainstreaming report and equalities outcomes 2025-2029

We recognise the key role of the College in serving our community and, with our staff and students, are committed to addressing discrimination and inequality by ensuring a culture which promotes equality, diversity and inclusion for all students and staff. We aim to provide safe, inclusive spaces for our staff, students, stakeholders and visitors where everyone feels valued, welcome and included. The [mainstreaming report and equality outcomes](#) will be a working document, and the Board of Management and staff of the College are committed to monitoring and reviewing progress in delivering our Equality Outcomes Plan for 2025 to 2029. The student experience strategy supports our equality outcomes and contributes to their achievement.

Our strategic aims

Our approach to student experience is driven by three strategic aims.

Values	+ Students feel part of a supportive and inclusive organisation (supports college strategic aim 5)
Involvement	+ Students are involved in the life of UHI North, West and Hebrides and beyond (supports college strategic aim 5)
Influence	+ Students participate actively in quality and governance arrangements (supports college strategic aim 5)

Strategic aims, objectives and success

+ Strategic aim one: Inclusion

Students feel part of a supportive and inclusive organisation.

Developing a culture that brings our values to life, in which every individual feels fully engaged in the Colleges mission, knowing how they contribute to the collective endeavour and confident that they will be recognised and rewarded for their efforts.

Objectives:

- + Through targeted CPD opportunities, staff reviews and development, have dedicated, knowledgeable and accessible staff who deliver a high-quality student experience.
- + Offer a range of high-quality, accessible, support services to meet students' needs.
- + Provide appropriate support and referral for student mental health and wellbeing.
- + Ensure students are aware of, and how to access, learning support both online and face to face (where available) throughout their student journey.
- + Meet the criteria as set out in the Scottish Government Student Mental Health Action Plan and in conjunction with the UHI Partnership's Student Mental Health Strategy.
- + Deliver supportive services and report progress that contributes to the achievement of our Equality Outcomes 2025-2029.

Success criteria and key performance indicators:

- + 75% of identified staff have participated in relevant CPD, that ensures our staff participate in current and appropriate training.
- + A range of reporting criteria and associated KPI targets have been developed, and reported on regularly to key meetings and committees, which demonstrate usage trends for student support services, including funding applications, personal learning support plans (PLSPs), access of wellbeing supports, library usage, and counselling referrals.
- + Utilisation of wellbeing platforms including Spectrum Life and UHI North, West and Hebrides Brightspace student wellbeing module have increased by 50%.
- + Multiple communication points throughout the learner journey have been used to publicise our services and encourage students to access them, on at least 3 separate occasions within the academic year.
- + We have met the criteria set out in the Scottish Government Mental Health Action Plan, and in collaboration with UHI, reported our progress in achievement of the actions outlined in the associated implementation plan.

+ Strategic aim two: Involvement

Students are involved in the life of UHI North, West and Hebrides and beyond.

Objectives:

- + Develop and maintain an effective partnership agreement and working arrangements with HISA, to include monitoring of the HISA MoU and action plan associated with this strategy.
- + Support the student voice representative system by ensuring student facing staff are trained and understand their responsibilities in supporting student representation activities.
- + In collaboration with HISA and our students, provide a range of engagement opportunities both online and face to face (where available) to ensure all students feel part of UHI North, West and Hebrides community.
- + Actively support and encourage students to contribute to social activities, conferences, and diverse campaigns at a local, regional, and national level.
- + Use induction and other opportunities throughout the academic year to publicise events and engagement opportunities.

Success criteria and key performance indicators:

- + Working with HISA, we have student representation on all Board, committee and SVR meetings.
- + Working with HISA, effective support is in place and has been accessed by all UHI North, West and Hebrides HISA office bearers.
- + Student survey feedback has been reviewed, changes implemented and communicated to all students.
- + An action log of "you said, we did" from SVR meeting feedback has been communicated to all students and staff.
- + Student representative survey feedback has been reviewed, changes implemented and communicated to all students and staff.



+ Strategic aim three: Influence

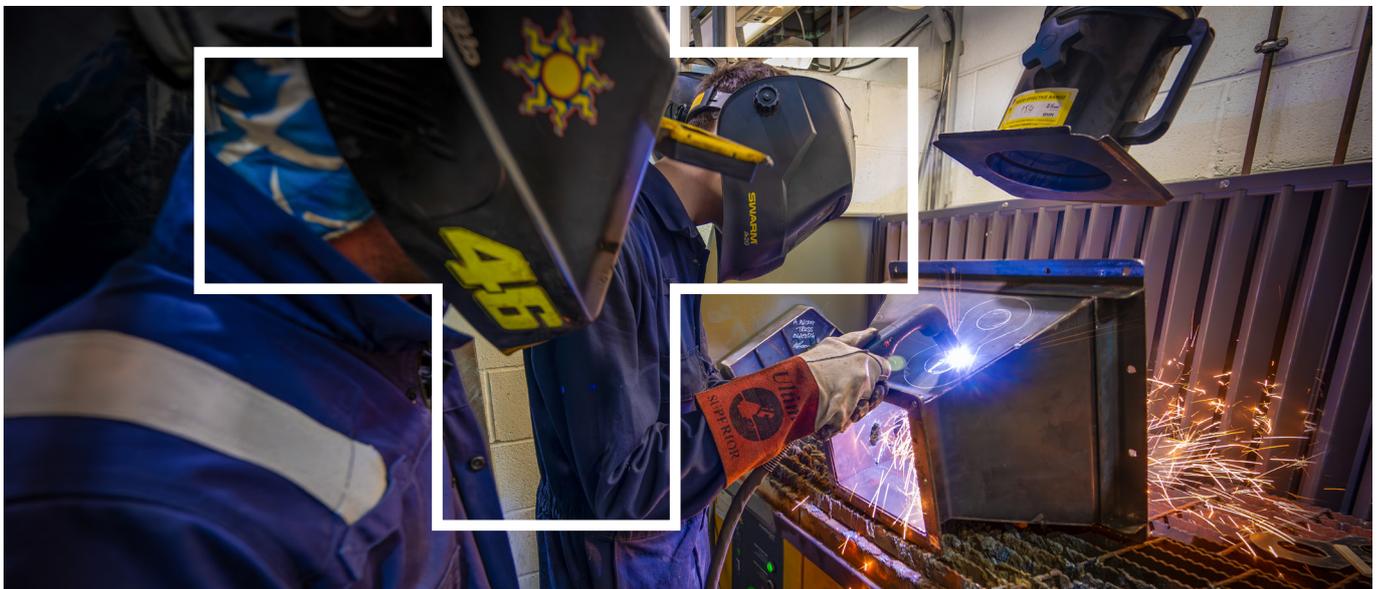
Students participate actively in quality and governance arrangements.

Objectives:

- + Support student representation at Board of Management (BoM), committee, and course level, in partnership with HISA.
- + Promote student elections and support the duly elected office bearers to carry out their role effectively.
- + Seek student views through our surveys which capture early student experience and student satisfaction and respond to feedback to enhance the student experience.
- + Using feedback from student voice representative (SVR) meetings, enhance the student experience.
- + Work with HISA to support student representative training.
- + Survey all student representatives to gain feedback on their experiences of participation in BoM, committee, SVR and course level meetings.

Success criteria and key performance indicators:

- + Working with HISA, we have student representation on all Board, committee and SVR meetings.
- + Working with HISA, effective support is in place and has been accessed by all UHI North, West and Hebrides HISA office bearers.
- + Student survey feedback has been reviewed, changes implemented and communicated to all students.
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- + Student representative survey feedback has been reviewed, changes implemented and communicated to all students and staff.





Key priorities in 2025/2026

- + Building on our Memorandum of Understanding with HISA, further develop effective working relationships to support the aims and objectives within this strategy.
- + Improve participations rates across our range of student satisfaction surveys.
- + Improve student voice representation across our further education full time courses.
- + Improve student representation within Board, committee and operational meetings.
- + Effectively promote and increase the number to students accessing our wellbeing and support services.

Shared key performance indicators:

- + Student success is at or above the National and UHI average (shared KPI with curriculum).
- + Student retention rates are maintained in 2025/2026 and above regional and national benchmark by 2026/2027 and 2027/2028 (shared KPI with curriculum).
- + Maintain high student satisfaction rates, at or above the UHI average and above the sector average (shared KPI with curriculum).
- + Student survey participation rate is 50% or above (shared KPI with curriculum).

Key Performance Indicator (KPI) measures will be an internal referenced document that will reflect the most recent sets of KPIs to compare for monitoring performance and to track our progress. Our progress towards KPI achievement will be reported to the Learning, Teaching and Research Committee of the Board of Management. Some KPI measures are shared with other departments or across the college.

Key enabling strategies

The student experience strategy aligns with the following internal and external documents:

UHI North, West and Hebrides:

- + HISA and UHI North, West and Hebrides Memorandum of Understanding 2023-2024
- + UHI Mental Health Strategy 2024-2027

External supporting documents:

- + [Scottish Government Student Mental Health Action Plan](#)
- + [Scottish Government student mental health action plan](#)
- + [Get involved - Student partnership agreement \(uhi.ac.uk\)](#)
- + [HISA Strategic Plan 2024-2027](#)





UHI | **NORTH, WEST AND HEBRIDES**
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www.nwh.uhi.ac.uk



UHI North, West and Hebrides is a trading name of The Board of Management of UHI North, West and Hebrides which is a registered charity, number SC021215.

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