

University of the Highlands and Islands Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) 2020-21

Introduction

The purpose of this agreement is to present the work being done to improve the student experience in partnership between the University of the Highlands and Islands ('the university'), including our college academic partners, and the Highlands and Islands Students' Association ('HISA'), and to show students how they can get involved in that activity. It includes all students studying with the university and our partner colleges, on further and higher education courses. It does not replace other strategic documents, and students are not limited by this document – you are actively encouraged to tell us how we can make your education better in any way.

Our university community

The University and HISA are proud of the contribution we make to the Highlands and Islands regional community and beyond. The purpose of the university is to have a transformational impact on the development and prospects of the region, its people and its communities. Our vision is that we will be nationally and internationally recognised as a distinctive and innovative partnership which embraces both further and higher education. It will be:

The university *in* the Highlands and Islands - Building upon the individual and distinctive strengths of each of its constituent institutions it will make a demonstrable contribution to the vibrancy of the communities of the region.

The university *for* the Highlands and Islands - Providing flexible access to opportunities for all parts of the region and beyond, enabled by the use of information technologies.

The university *of* the Highlands and Islands - Drawing upon the distinctive characteristics of the region in developing research and teaching of national and international relevance and excellence. In so doing, it will attract students, staff and researchers from throughout the world and develop national and international links and alliances.

Our student body is central to that purpose and vision. Both the University and HISA value the diversity of our student population and work to make sure everyone feels welcome and supported. All staff and students should interact in a way which helps create an inclusive, pleasant and welcoming environment for everyone.

Students at the university are represented collectively by HISA. HISA represents the views and interests of students to Academic Partners and other decision makers and works in partnership with the university to secure the best possible student experience. HISA also represents students locally

at all of our academic partners with the exception of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI who are represented locally by their college students' association. Find out more at www.hisa.uhi.ac.uk.

This agreement includes all our further and higher education students in their relationship as members of HISA.

What is partnership?

The terms 'partner' and 'partnership' are used in a broad sense to indicate joint working between students and staff. Partnership working is based on the values of:

- openness;
- trust and honesty;
- agreed shared goals and values; and
- regular communication between the partners.

It is not based on the legal conception of equal responsibility and liability; rather, partnership working recognises that all members in the partnership have legitimate, but different, perceptions and experiences. By working together to a common agreed purpose, steps can be taken that lead to enhancements for all concerned. The terms reflect a mature relationship based on mutual respect between students and staff.

Part A – Student partnership and engagement at the university

Formal student representation

The university is committed to involving students in the decision making process and making sure that they have the best possible experience while studying with us. All further and higher education students are automatically members of the Students' Association (HISA). The university and HISA work closely together to ensure that students are represented on all relevant university committees and are supported and trained to fulfil their roles.

Opportunities to become involved in student representation include the following:

- Student representatives are present on all relevant university and academic partner committees, including: Faculty Boards, Learning Teaching and Quality Committee and Academic Council. Students are informed about vacancies and how to take part when they arise.
- Each class should have a class representative who will attend Course Committees and make student views known on issues related to the course experience. On-going communication will be encouraged out-with formal meetings.
- Focus groups and consultation events are arranged when major changes, for example to curriculum, are planned, and students are invited to take part in these groups.

Student representatives are trained and supported in their respective roles. There is also the opportunity to meet with other student reps to support each other.

Student engagement in the life of the college

Student involvement is not restricted to formal representative structures. All students are encouraged to become partners in shaping the life of the university, including at your local academic partner. Opportunities include:

- Participating in volunteering opportunities within and out-with College.
- Giving honest, constructive feedback by taking part in surveys, focus groups and other feedback opportunities.
- Sharing opinions with class representatives, or other student reps.
- Speaking directly with lecturing staff or support staff.
- Supporting activities of your class, including interacting with other students online.
- Developing and taking part in events, societies, clubs and groups.
- Providing suggestions, complements, feedback or raising issues through the Red Button student feedback system.

Staff will seek to engage with students in both formal and informal structures, and ensure that students are a central part of college decision making and informing of policy and practice. Means of ensuring clear and accessible communication between the wider student community and the college will be continually reviewed jointly to ensure that this is enhanced on an ongoing basis.

Highlands and Islands Students' Association

HISA primarily exists to be an advocate for students across the university, by representing their rights, needs and opinions. You can become involved by:

- Standing for election as a sabbatical Principal Officer (paid, full-time roles within the Association)
- Standing for election as a HISA Depute. There are representatives for each academic partner within the university and other specialist roles too. Student officers form the Executive Committee which steers the operational direction of the Association.
- Taking part in HISA Con. HISA Con is an annual event, open to all elected officers (including class reps), which offers an opportunity for students to meet virtually to discuss and set the policy and practice of the Students' Association.

Student engagement in the life of the university

Student involvement is not restricted to formal representative structures. All students are encouraged to become partners in shaping the life of the university. Opportunities include:

- Giving honest, constructive feedback by taking part in surveys, focus groups and other feedback opportunities.
- Sharing opinions with class representatives, or other student reps.
- Speaking directly with lecturing staff or support staff.

- Providing suggestions, complements, feedback or raising issues through the Red Button student feedback system.

Part B Partnership working 2020-21

Introduction

The university and HISA regularly work together on a range of issues. The issues we work together on are chosen by analysis of student needs. To determine what students needs are, we look at the results of formal student surveys, student data, and other feedback mechanisms. Our current areas of partnership working include:

- *The development of student sport within in our academic partners, through clubs and societies, and through opportunities available at regional level across the university.*
- *Sporting Blues: annual awards to recognise sporting achievement within the student community.*
- *HISA Awards: annual student – led awards to recognise the efforts of university / college staff and student officers.*
- *Class representatives and student representation: support and development of our student reps.*
- *Transport and safer travel*
- *Student community: facilitating students to build communities.*
- *Environment and sustainability Group: student forum focusing on environmental issues across the partnership.*
- *Student finance: development and promotion of initiatives to support student finances.*
- *Student welfare: working in partnership to enhance student welfare.*
- *Careers and employability: helping students to develop their employability skills.*
- *Work to support changes as a result of COVID-19.*

To support our partnership working as outlined above, we set 'SMART' (specific, measurable, realistic, with targets) goals for the coming year. These goals are the result of an annual student consultation which all students are welcome to participate in. SMART goals will be determined by November 2020.

Part C Report of Partnership Working in 2019/20

This section of the Student Partnership Agreement provides a report on work completed towards issues identified as partnership working themes in the 2018/19 agreement. Last year the three themes we agreed to work on were:

1. Transport. This workstream considered the transport needs of students, looking specifically at costs, availability and accessibility of transport across the Highlands and Islands.
2. Student Funding. This workstream considered funding available to students.
3. Student Community. This workstream considered how to support better connections between students from all university academic partners ensuring every student, regardless of which partner they study at, feel part of a the university student community.

Progress towards these themes is detailed below.

Work theme: transport

- Transport costs and use

The university has promoted discounted bus travel available for students in the Perth, Elgin, Inverness and Thurso areas. We have also promoted use of a mobile phone app that allows students to track their bus, and make better use of time.

HISA made representation to the Scottish Government regarding the cost of bus travel for students.

- Travel safety advice

The university set up a webpage providing travel safety advice and is available on the student area of the website: <https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/students/support/health-and-wellbeing/safe-travel/>. Regular promotional messages were sent out to students during semester two with relevant safety advice.

- Cycling promotion

HISA conducted cycling transport research surveys at West Highland College, North Highland College (Thurso campus), Moray College and Orkney College. These were written up and a gap analysis prepared for each college, including practical recommendations for each site. HISA and the university worked together to provide discounted bikes at a number of academic partners.

- Link with Environment and Sustainability Group

The work of the transport group was linked to that of the Environment and Sustainability Group.

Work theme : Student Community

- Development of programme spaces for class reps to connect with all students on their programme.

A template was created for a student-only space that will be attached to programme areas on Brightspace. This will provide an additional tool for class reps to communicate with all students on their course to gather feedback and inform of actions. This has been tested on several programmes and is now being rolled out to other course groups.

- Investigate the opportunity for pop-up student unions working with local organisations.

HISA investigated the feasibility of HISA hosting student nights in partnership with local bars or clubs to provide opportunities for students to meet in social settings. Some 'pop up' student union events were organised earlier in the year.

- HISA led events such as the UHI Football Cup and Adventure Weekend that bring students together.

HISA continued to run physical events that bring students together from across the partnership. Since the COVID-19 crisis, the emphasis has moved to attempt to move events to the virtual space.

- The development of an online social platform for students to connect.

An online space for students to meet and connect with each other is being developed. This will be a non-academic space for students to connect socially in the style of a 'virtual student union'. The platform will be accessible for all students but will target open and distance learning students specifically.

University Principal and Vice Chancellor

Date:

HISA President

Date: