

Application for Funding to Support the Research and Development of a Post-Regionalisation Student Representation Structure for the Highlands and Islands Region

I. Executive Summary

- I.1 We, the students' associations and institutions of the Highlands and Islands, are seeking funding for a Student Representation Research and Development project to design and implement new student representation structures for the Highlands and Islands fit for the regionalisation era.
- I.2 These redesigned structures, in whatever form the project leads to, must ensure that students are able to effectively engage with the new structures and processes of the regional board, the individual colleges, and UHI. Our current students' association and student representation structures do not have the capacity to meet the demands of this transition and ensure the process is inclusive of all students studying within the partnership, on top of our regular representational responsibilities.
- I.3 We are therefore seeking £205,500 funding to enable the delivery of a project which will operate from the present up until the end of academic year 2014/15, with any new structure(s) coming into place either for the academic year 2013/14 in an interim phase or at the beginning of the academic year 2015/16 as a permanent arrangement. The resulting model must meet the needs of all students throughout the region, regardless of mode, level or location of study. As the Highlands and Islands region's further education delivery has a unique, and uniquely complex, model, so the student representation structures will need to be tailored to respond to it.
- I.4 We note that, uniquely among the regions, the Scottish Funding Council is receiving and considering this bid separately from a broader colleges' bid and does so with no bearing on the outcome of that bid.
- I.5 **This project aims to create a framework for effective student representation in the changed context of the Highlands and Islands region post-regionalisation which will:**
 - 1. Be agreed by all institutions and students' associations;**
 - 2. Be implemented by all institutions and students' associations working in partnership.**
- I.6 UHI and the partner colleges will provide support to the project in the form of management support, office space, event organisation etc.
- I.7 The Highlands and Islands Colleges Principals' Group and the University of the Highlands and Islands Executive Board fully support this project and its objective to research and develop a sustainable and effective student representation model for the region.

2. Context

- 2.1 The University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) covers over half the land mass of Scotland and has over fifty learning centres. Currently UHI encompasses higher education and research, with nine further education colleges 'contracted' to deliver the UHI-coordinated higher education courses while managing their further education provision on an individual, local basis.
- 2.2 There is currently a students' association for HE students, known as UHISA, which represents all HE students enrolled in the university regardless of which college they attend. The nine UHI academic partners who are designated further education colleges are also legally expected to have a students' association, though these vary considerably in terms of their level of resources, staff support, officers and activities. These students' associations represent all students, both HE and FE.
- 2.3 As a result of the government's regionalisation agenda, a working group on the future structure and function of the University of the Highlands and Islands and the Highlands and Islands college region was commissioned by the Cabinet Secretary under the chair of Michael Foxley, and a report was published in October 2012. The changes proposed by that report, which takes into account and adapts government guidance on regionalisation to the Highlands and Islands' context, would see:
 1. UHI become the single fundable body for HE and FE in the Highlands and Islands region, with FE funding delegated to a new FE Committee sitting directly below the UHI Court.
 2. The development of a three way partnership structure within UHI: HE, FE, and Research strands, overseen by a 'triumvirate' of a Principal and Associate Principals.
 3. A single outcome agreement for HE, FE, and Research in the Highlands and Islands region,
 4. Close partnership working between the colleges, under the new FE Committee, to develop a shared, regional approach for the FE section of the Highlands and Islands Outcome Agreement.
 5. A continuing Outcome Agreement for Sabhal Mòr Ostaig to reflect its unique function and status.
- 2.3 The Foxley report also recognised the importance of student representation. It recommended that there be two student members on UHI's Court (the UHISA President plus one student from further education), and two members on the FE Committee (again the UHISA President and one student from further education). It rightly recognised the challenges involved in effective student engagement in the Highlands and Islands region.
- 2.4 Existing representational structures are not fit for the purpose of representing all students at a regional level or for engaging effectively with the proposed new institutional structures, lacking as they do any region-wide FE-focussed layer of representation. Any new student representation structures will therefore need to be able to facilitate a coordinated approach

to student issues across the partner colleges and recognise and respond to both the commonalities and differences between FE and HE students.

3. Objectives

- 3.1 The objective of this project is to create a framework for effective student representation in the changed context of the Highlands and Islands region, post-regionalisation.
- 3.2 The framework will:
 1. Be agreed by all institutions and students' associations,
 2. Be implemented by all institutions and students' associations working in partnership.
- 3.3 The project will aim to establish:
 1. Agreement on how the further education student member for Court and the Further Education Committee will be selected.
 2. Agreement from colleges and students' associations on the level of resources the new representation structures will need.
 3. A plan for how the new student representation structures will intersect with the new UHI structures, including student membership on other Boards and committees.
 4. How the student representation structures will work together in relation to HE, FE, and Research activity.
 5. How cross-college, regional-level student representation will be coordinated, and how local college student representation will be managed.
 6. How HE and FE student representation will be coordinated, and how it will feed in to the joint Highlands and Islands Outcome Agreement.
- 3.4 The project will develop and propose model structures which can meet all these needs.

4. Methods and Timescale

- 4.1 The project will research and develop a new model for student representation post-regionalisation.
- 4.2 The project will be managed by a project board which will include student representation, institutional representation, and external membership from Partnerships for Change¹.
- 4.3 The project staff will consist of two full-time posts and a student research team.

¹ Partnerships for Change is the SFC-funded project run by sparqs and NUS Scotland to support Scotland's colleges and students' associations through the student representation dimension of regionalisation.

- 4.4 A lead researcher will be employed to coordinate and deliver the project. They will:
1. Undertake a mapping exercise of student representation in the region, including structures and support mechanisms.
 2. Supervise the other project staff and the research undertaken.
 3. Recruit, train and manage a team of around ten part-time student researchers who will facilitate focus groups throughout the network.
 4. Analyse data gained by the project from around the region.
 5. Conduct institutional engagement, including the gathering of views of institutional staff, management and governors.
 6. Conduct external research and mapping into sector practice, including comparable models.
 7. Develop consensus from this around a model for student representation post-regionalisation.
- 4.5 An assistant researcher will be employed as part of the project, to:
1. Assist the work of the lead researcher.
 2. Conduct focus groups that are beyond the capacity of the student research team.
 3. Undertake analysis of data, in particular from student focus groups.
 4. Provide administrative support to the project, including communication with institutions regarding practicalities of the project's implementation (eg focus groups and other meetings).
- 4.6 A student research team, consisting of around ten students, will be employed part-time over the period of one academic year or less to undertake extensive ground-level research of student views, by way of focus groups. There should be specifically targeted recruitment from among distinct groups of students, such as Gaelic medium learners, part-time and distance learning students, work-based students, students at learning centres, and so on.
- 4.7 The work phases will be as follows.

Phase 1 – Establishment (remainder of academic year 2012/13)

1. Appointment of full-time staff posts.
2. Creation of project board.
3. Recruitment and training of student team.
4. Agreement of project and individual workplans.
5. Early mapping activity, including development of:
 - a. Likely minimum standards for student representation in the region.
 - b. Interim representative structures regarding the FE Representative.
 - c. Likely resource implications for consideration by UHI Court and FE Committee from 2013/14 onwards.

Phase 2 – Research and Pilot (academic year 2013/14)

1. Extensive focus group research throughout network reaching out to all areas of the student profile in the Highlands and Islands region,

aiming to discover student perceptions of what they seek from student representation and students' associations.

2. Consultation with students' association Executives and the Boards and senior managements of both UHI and the colleges.
3. Research of comparative structural and resource models nationally and elsewhere.
4. Implementation of interim structures and resources surrounding the FE Representative, including the remit, support and accountability.
5. Monitoring and evaluation of those interim structures.

Phase 3 – Agreement and implementation of permanent structures (academic year 2014/15)

1. Based on evaluation of interim structures, development of agreement across network of the best permanent model for student engagement, and ensuring approval by all boards and students' associations;
2. Creation of constitutional and democratic arrangements for new structures;
3. Development of a clear map of engagement of student representational structures with institutional and regional structures;
4. Identification of resource needs (budget, officer and staffing costs etc), and negotiation/research of funding;
5. Support of first elections under new system, and development of appropriate staff support for students' associations.

4.8 This would suggest a project completion at the end of academic year 2014/15, with first elections to new permanent structures in spring of 2015 for the academic year 2015/16.

5. Budget

5.1 The following funding is sought from the Scottish Funding Council's transformation fund for regionalisation.²

Year 1, 2012/13 (January to August only³)

£32,500	Lead researcher and assistant researcher (6 months)
£10,000	Travel and subsistence
£42,500	Year total

² These sums are based on estimated annual salaries of around £30,000-£35,000 for lead researcher and £20,000 for assistant researcher, plus estimates for other costs such as employer National Insurance contributions, and projections for travel and subsistence expenses. The figures are subject to relevant HR evaluation of full-time roles, including agreement of pay scale.

³ Dependent on the timescale for the response to this bid, and for recruitment and appointment.

Year 2, 2013/14

£65,000	Lead researcher and assistant researcher
£8,000	10 student research team members ⁴
£15,000	Travel and subsistence
£88,000	Year total

Year 3, 2014/15

£65,000	Lead researcher and assistant researcher
£10,000	Travel and subsistence
£75,000	Year total

5.2 **The total bid is therefore £205,500.**

6. Institutional contributions

- 6.1 IT and management support will be provided to the project staff by UHI Executive Office.
- 6.2 Office hosting will be provided to lead and assistant researcher posts by colleges, dependent on location preference of successful candidate.
- 6.3 Practical support to work of project will be provided by colleges such as meeting space, IT support and refreshments for focus groups; IT facilities to any student team members from the college; and meeting spaces for occasional project team meetings or other meetings involving the Research and Development Officer or student researchers.
- 6.4 Guidance and support will be provided to the project by a wide variety of staff and student officers, including but not limited to membership of the project board.

7. Summary

- 7.1 The students' associations of UHI and the partner colleges, the Highlands and Islands Colleges Principals' Group and UHI Executive Board all fully support this project and its objective to research and develop a sustainable and effective student representation model for the region.

ENDS

⁴ Based nominally on a suggested £7.50 per hour wage, with researchers contracted to do 10 focus groups each at 3 hours' work per focus group including planning and preparation, plus around 4 development and training days, and payment for travel time.