

Student Partnership Agreement 2026-2029

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 (**UHI**), including our academic partners, and the Highlands and Islands Students' Association (**HISA**). UHI and HISA consider the student experience to be made up of different elements (e.g. learning and teaching, support and student community) that impact your overall experience while you are studying with us.

Through the Student Partnership Agreement (**SPA**), students and staff work together in partnership as equals to improve and enhance the student experience. This approach to student engagement is underpinned by the recognition that students are the experts on their own student experience. Neither HISA nor UHI can make unilateral decisions about the SPA. All decisions must be reached in partnership, and the work must be carried out together with student feedback embedded in shaping the SPA.

Where 'university' is referred to in this document, it is taken to include the colleges, or academic partners (**APs**) that form the university. 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 student experience better in any way!

This document provides a summary of activity from the last SPA alongside an outline of the current SPA's themes and objectives.

What is an SPA?

An SPA is an agreement between the university and the students' association, demonstrating key areas of work that both bodies have committed to working on in partnership. This work is focussed on improving the student experience, and the themes are chosen by students.

The SPA is an independent mechanism allowing students to directly raise areas that they would like to see improved. Whilst it can be supported by strategic or operation plans and ongoing work, it is not led by these. Where appropriate, the work undertaken within the framework of the SPA can inform and support institutional review processes.

How does the SPA work?

The SPA takes place over a 3-year cycle. The first year is dedicated to establishing the new SPA themes, allowing 2 years to focus on working on the chosen themes.

When a new SPA is being established, work is carried out to gather as much student feedback data from the previous year. Key areas are identified for improvement using survey data, review data and other forms of student feedback.

This process creates a 'longlist' of themes which are then reviewed by HISA's Executive Committee. During this review process, the HISA Executive Committee use their knowledge of local student issues to decide on ten final themes. These ten final themes become the 'shortlist' which students then vote on. The outcome of this vote picks 2 themes which become the new Student Partnership Agreement.

Once the SPA themes are agreed, working groups are established – these are referred to as 'Cluster Groups' and they are responsible for developing and overseeing the work on their assigned SPA theme. Each theme is assigned 3 individuals to lead on the work:

- ✚ Lead HISA cross-campus officer
- ✚ Lead HISA staff member
- ✚ Lead UHI staff member

These individuals are usually involved because the theme aligns with their area of expertise or because they are already involved in similar work.

If you are a student and you want to find out more or get involved you can contact HISA locally through your local Depute or you can email: hisa@uhi.ac.uk.

2024-2026 STUDENT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT: Summary of work

The themes for the 2024-2026 SPA were:

Improved academic growth, engagement and quality 	This theme included improving the student experience, evidenced through survey results, improving the student voice rep system and other such initiatives. It also included the active campaigning of elected HISA officers on their manifesto pledges.
Active campaigning and community engagement 	This theme included active campaigning around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion including partnership working on various EDI initiatives and Pride events, and consultation on the UK Supreme Court ruling on gender.
Celebrating success 	This theme included employability skills development, annual teaching awards, sporting blues, volunteer achievement and student voice rep reward and recognition.

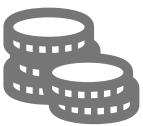
Impact from these themes included:

- ✚ Improvements to the Student Voice Rep (**SVR**) system through the SVR Action Plan, this includes a new Microsoft Teams space for reps, revised SVR training, and a focus on SVR recruitment which has led to an increased number of 572 SVRs in 2026.
- ✚ Cooperation on the promotion of student surveys.
- ✚ Information on the HISA Advice Service has been added to UHI webpages, MyDay, Brightspace and others with resulting increase in numbers of cases. The Advice Service has also been more widely involved in university projects such as reviews of disciplinary procedures and supporting students affected by curriculum and campus changes
- ✚ Revised induction for HISA Student Officers, including sessions with senior UHI staff on shared priorities.

- ✚ Officer manifestos shared with key staff.
- ✚ Development of clubs and societies and the launch of 7 networks which has led to a doubling of club membership over 2 years. In 2026 there were 1080 memberships of HISA clubs and societies.
- ✚ Formation of a new Post Graduate Research society.
- ✚ Development of a new student sport strategy. We are working together on sport through the sports development group towards the sports action plan. This has led to some sporting success in shinty and the successful running of 2 UHI varsity events.
- ✚ Sporting Blues were delivered in semester 2 of each academic year.
- ✚ UHI and HISA were awarded the student mental health agreement from the National Union of Students (**NUS**). Training for HISA staff and Officers to take place in October. Campaigns will be taking place, and additionally, mental health will be a priority for the HISA Executive Committee this year.
- ✚ HISA Awards were delivered in Spring of each year, with 640 nominations received in 2026.
- ✚ Throughout 2025/26, UHI Futures worked in partnership with HISA to support its Officer Training Programme. This included a series of interactive sessions focused on reflecting on officers' own skills and development, creating impactful CVs, contemporary career development, and equipping officers with the knowledge and confidence to promote UHI Futures to students. Officers were also offered one-to-one career development discussions to provide tailored guidance and support.
- ✚ Developing closer working relationships between UHI and HISA communications teams to promote events and celebrate student success across the partnership.
- ✚ Active campaigning around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (**EDI**) including partnership working on the Athena Swan project, 16 Days to end Gender Based Violence (**GBV**), various Pride events, student engagement in marches and vigils, consulting on the UK Supreme Court ruling on gender, and increased representation and engagement with our disabled community.

2026-2029 STUDENT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT:

Themes and objectives

THEME	CLUSTER GROUP	OBJECTIVES
Action on the cost-of-living crisis 	HISA officer: Andi Garrity HISA staff: Elena Arroyo UHI staff: Lyndsay Sutherland	1. Review of financial and basic needs support 2. Support for students in rented accommodation 3. Review of hidden course costs
Improved student community 	HISA officer: Oliver Sweeney HISA staff: Emma Miller UHI staff: Sorcha Kirker	1. Improved student safety and respect on campus 2. Tackling student isolation 3. Consultation on student community