

Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) 2022

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, including our partner colleges, on further and higher education courses. Where 'university' is referred to in this document, it is taken to include the colleges 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. Where the 'university' is mentioned throughout this document, it is taken to include our academic partners.

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 its academic partners) 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 and academic partners 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, Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, Academic Council, College Boards and others. Students are informed about vacancies and how to take part when they arise.
- Each class should have a Student Voice Rep 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 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:

- Participating in volunteering opportunities within and out-with university.
- Giving honest, constructive feedback by taking part in surveys, focus groups and other feedback opportunities.
- Sharing opinions with Student Voice Reps, 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 decision making and informing of policy and practice. Means of ensuring clear and accessible communication between the wider student community is continually reviewed 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 Student Voice Reps), which offers an opportunity for students to meet to discuss and set the policy and practice of the Students' Association.

Part B Partnership working in 2022

Work themes

The University and HISA agreed, based on themes identified by student loop conference delegates, three themes to work together on during the year. These themes were then agreed with the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC).

Theme 1: Disability Support, Awareness, and Accessibility

This theme includes aspects of mental health, physical access to campus, online accessibility to studies, and consideration of the impacts of long COVID.

Theme 2: Socialising, Connectivity, and Community

This theme will consider aspects of digital fatigue, a return to in – person and hybrid social activities, alternative social opportunities for those who don't feel safe returning to physical events, and issues of digital connectivity.

Theme 3: Environment and Green Sustainability

This theme will continue to focus on the climate crisis, how we can support an 'Eco – recovery', the re-introduction of sustainable practices in our colleges, and greening our campuses.

These themes will be supported by several 'SMART' (specific, measurable, realistic, with targets goals) that will determine work towards the themes. Students can find details of these objectives and stay up to date with progress by checking the SPA sections of the university and HISA websites.

Other areas of work

The university and HISA regularly work together on a range of issues. Our other 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.*
- *Student voice representatives and student representation: support and development of our student reps.*
- *Environment and sustainability Group: student and staff forum focusing on environmental issues across the partnership.*
- *Residential life: work to develop the student experience of staying in our halls of residence.*
- *Audit, and Policy & Procedure development: through active membership of key university committees.*

Part C Report of Partnership Working in 2020/21

This section of the Student Partnership Agreement provides a report on work completed towards partnership working themes in the 2020/21 agreement.

Student Loop Conference 'SMART' Objectives

A number of 'SMART' objectives were generated as a result of the student 'loop' conference. These objectives are: specific, measurable, agreed, realistic and have a time – frame. They are also important in developing a democratic element to the partnership agreement. Progress towards this year's objectives comprises:

- Work to develop a resource to highlight internal and external mental health support available to students. Resources have been developed and are available at: <https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/students/support/support-for-your-wellbeing-and-mental-health/> for full student support info <https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/students/support/>, UHI mental health and wellbeing support <https://www.facebook.com/uhihealthwellbeing>
- Student Support Group is considering how students can meet support and counselling staff at yearly inductions.
- The creation of a Peer Support Group framework, to enable students and HISA to set up new groups as demand arises at academic partners was begun.
- A commitment to train HISA Staff and Officers in Scottish Mental Health First Aid, and an exploration of how more UHI staff can take part in this training. Although this course was not available during the year of the SPA, continued efforts were made to raise awareness and provide training to HISA officers and staff.
- Better promotion of opportunities for students to socialise. Analysis of student feedback on comms took place and better use is being made of social media and MyDay. A number of events were arranged by HISA during lockdown.
- Additional dedicated support sessions for disabled students. HISA are working towards a consultation of students with disabilities to see how best to respond to these needs.
- Work to develop or access additional training for HISA Staff and Officers in relation to disability awareness and support is ongoing.
- Improvements to the accessibility of E-Resources and HISA and UHI websites, and consideration of how the available accessibility tools and software can be further promoted.

Other areas of partnership working.

Work theme: Student Sport

Sports Development Group. The group has continued to meet despite the disruption as a result of the pandemic. While formal sport has been restricted, the group has worked to maintain opportunities for physical activity during lockdown. New student sports ambassadors are working to build interest in physical activity and to map current provision of facilities at each campus.

HISA also introduced Sports Interns who have supported online activities for students, produced a monthly sport newsletter and mapped sports facilities.

Work theme : Sporting Blues

These annual awards for students competing in elite sports ran again in 2021. Nominations were naturally impacted by the pandemic but we wished to encourage students that when they are able to compete again we will be ready to recognise their achievements.

Work theme: HISA Awards

The annual teaching awards give students the chance to recognise university staff, and student volunteers, who have made a difference to their student experience during the year. Despite the pandemic, the highest ever number of nominations (around 900) were received in 2020. HISA Awards were run once again in 2021 with a healthy number of nominations from throughout the partnership.

Work theme: Student Voice Reps and student representation

Considerable work took place in partnership between HISA, the university and the academic partners to ensure the Student Voice Rep structures were adapted to the new online methods of working. This has included recruitment, training and student voice rep meetings. Considerable work was given to the development of training materials by HISA and the EO Student Development Officer.

Work theme: Transport and safer travel

With the year of lockdown, most transport initiatives were paused. However, work has continued through the cycling intern has continued to map and work towards development of safe and green travel for students.

Work theme: Student community

We worked together to deliver a range of online social activities during lockdown. Recognising that social connections are an important aspect of the student experience, HISA have delivered innovative and quality events to participate in (including quizzes, comedy nights, guest speakers etc). HISA Con ran in early 2021, with the highest ever number of students attending. We are taking on board that running events virtually allows more students to participate in our events.

Work theme: Environment and sustainability Group

The group has continued to work towards standing work themes of: 'Bin Unethical Investment', 'Sustainable Food Policy', 'HISA's Recognition of a Climate Emergency'. The group is also contributing towards the Partnership Carbon Management and Sustainability Plan 2020-2023

Work theme: Student finance:

The University established a fund to provide students without access to IT equipment at home with a laptop. A large number of laptop loans have been arranged as a result and the process will be repeated in future years.

Students who would like to purchase a laptop are being assisted by the University's new partnership with a computer supplier to offer students up to 20% discount off laptops and other IT equipment.

The University has also received additional discretionary funding which is being promoted to eligible students through Student Services.

Careers and employability.

The University Careers and Employability Centre has put in place a package of support to assist HISA elected officers with personal employability development.

HISA Conn 2021 has worked extensively with Careers team to deliver a careers – themed event this year with over 200 students attending. A Careers and Employability representative is also now attending Student Engagement Group.

Work theme: Work to support changes as a result of COVID-19.

Extensive partnership working has been vital during the past year to ensure that changes made as a result of the pandemic are right for our students. We made use of the full range of engagement structures including Student Voice Reps and student surveys to find out how we can best support our students as this time. We also set up a dedicated 'Student Panel' to act as a focus group on particular issues. It has been particularly noted that students wish the enhanced flexibility and new study choices to continue beyond the pandemic.

Todd Walker

Florence Jansen

University Principal and Vice Chancellor

Date: 9/12/2021

HISA President

Date: 09/12/2021