

University of the Highlands and Islands Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) 2017-18

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 at regional level 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.
- Subject Network Officers receive a small payment in return for representing students on the relevant Subject Network. Vacancies will be advertised this year for these competitively selected positions.
- 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 your Personal Academic Tutor.
- Supporting activities of your class, including interacting with other students online.
- Developing and taking part in events, societies, clubs and groups.

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 Regional Council. Regional Council is an annual event, open to all elected officers (including class reps and student network officers), which offers an opportunity for students to meet either in person or by video conference 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 your Personal Academic Tutor
- Providing suggestions, feedback or raising issues through the Red Button student feedback system.

Part B Partnership working 2017-18

Introduction

The university and HISA have agreed to work together on the following issues over the coming year. These themes were chosen by the students in an online vote during the May 2017 HISA Depute elections. Oversight and monitoring of the Student Partnership Agreement will be undertaken by the Student Engagement Group which will request progress reports from the SPA subgroup of SEG. The subgroup will be chaired by the Student Engagement Manager, and formed of work stream leads. Progress will be reported to QAEC on an annual basis.

1. Work together to improve mental health for all students

In this work stream HISA and UHI will work together in order to create structural and long-lasting changes by developing a **Student Mental Health Agreement**. The Agreement will cover both strategic and practical plans to make improvements in the way UHI and HISA work together to tackle the stigma attached to mental ill health and work towards improving the mental wellbeing of our student body. We will work with NUS Scotland to develop the Student Mental Health Agreement.

2. Work to improve learning resources

In this work stream UHI and HISA will work together in order to improve the Learning Resources that are available to students. This will include physical and digital resources and also access to student learning spaces, for example computers, libraries and social learning spaces.

3. Sustainability and the environment

In this work stream HISA and UHI will work together to improve the sustainability and environmental impact that the university and union has. We will work to develop a number of initiatives to encourage students and staff to lead a greener lifestyle.

Other Issues

We also agree to work together to investigate and address any issues arising from student feedback as required throughout the year. The university agrees to ensure that HISA has the support required to fulfil their role, and HISA agrees to ensure that it fulfils this role responsibly in making the student voice heard.

We are committed to keeping students informed of progress with the SPA, and will communicate regular updates on progress as well as keeping a live action log, which will be available on the HISA website.

Part C Report of Partnership Working in 2016/17

Part C of the Student Partnership Agreement provides a report on work completed towards issues identified as partnership working themes in the 2016/17 agreement.

Progress towards these work themes included:

1. Funding and bursaries
 - A. HISA actively campaigned in advance of a Scottish Government review of funding.
 - B. HISA and the University worked together to raise awareness of student support and funding issues and advice.

2. Blackboard and Video Conferencing
 - A. HISA worked with the University on themes identified including inconsistency in use of Video Conferencing across classes/programmes and concerns with the VLE service.
 - B. Learning and Information Services, together with Quality Managers are working on resulting projects to improve use of video conference and the virtual learning environment.
 - C. The university is participating with the sparqs online distance learning (ODL) project, which includes themes of learning resources.
 - D. The 2017 I.T. service review includes the VLE and VC resources.

3. Facilities and resources for students
 - A. Local issues were raised through class rep meetings, the HISA Deputes, local SAs and by students at academic partners.
 - B. Regional issues were raised through university groups such as the library practitioners group.
 - C. Details of local facilities contacts were gathered to assist with reporting.
 - D. The group also considered how reporting of issues can be improved.

What will continue to be worked on during 2017/18

- The university will remain as one of the project partners in the sparqs online distance learning (ODL) project.
- HISA will continue to be involved in the university's VLE review.
- HISA will continue to work with HISA deputes to try to resolve local facilities and resource issues.



University Principal and Vice Chancellor



HISA President

Date: 7/12/17