

# **Item 5**

**College Management Council Sub-committee: 18 January 2021.**

**Highlands and Islands Students' Association – Update.**

**Report by Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing.**

## **1. Purpose of Report**

To appraise the Sub-committee of the work of the Highlands and Islands Students' Association.

## **2. Recommendations**

The Sub-committee is invited to note:

### **2.1.**

The paper prepared by the Orkney Depute President of the Highlands and Islands Students' Association, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, outlining some key activities during November and December 2020.

## **3. Highlands and Islands Students' Association**

### **3.1.**

Both the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council continue to encourage colleges to ensure that students engage as fully as possible in the life and governance of colleges. Effective engagement of students features strongly in the Code of Good Governance for Scotland's Colleges published by Colleges Scotland.

### **3.2.**

In order to encourage and enable students to present their ideas to the College Management Council Sub-committee, a report is presented from the Highlands and Islands Student Association.

### **3.3.**

The paper prepared by the Orkney Depute President of the Highlands and Islands Students' Association is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

## **4. Corporate Governance**

This report relates to governance and procedural issues and therefore does not directly support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.

## **5. Financial Implications**

There are no significant financial implications arising directly from the recommendations of this noting report.

## **6. Legal Aspects**

There are no legal implications arising directly from this noting report.

## **7. Contact Officers**

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Email: [edward.abbott-halpin@orkney.uhi.ac.uk](mailto:edward.abbott-halpin@orkney.uhi.ac.uk).

## **8. Appendix**

Appendix 1: Paper from Highlands and Islands Students Association.

## Appendix 1

Highlands and Islands Students' Association

3<sup>rd</sup> January 2021

### HISA Orkney - CMC report

#### **1. KEY ISSUES**

The end of 2020 brought to HISA Orkney some long-awaited results, encouraging further hard work and enthusiasm. According to the UHI Early Student Experience Survey (ESES), sent out to students in October, HISA Orkney and HISA Shetland were the top two scores in regards to online engagement during Freshers across the entirety of UHI. Along with these excellent results, new challenges arose, marking November and December as one of the busiest periods for HISA Orkney.

##### **1.1. Mental Health & Social Isolation**

The worry of a new lockdown and the inability of travelling impacted students across UHI, intensifying an already stressful situation as well as weakening social interaction. In response to this, signposting of the online mental health services available to OC students regularly took place on Facebook. HISA Orkney was contacted by a few students looking for social opportunities and involved them in the creation of a new Walking & Wellbeing society, promoting social interaction as well as physical exercise and becoming the embodiment of the concept of “green prescription”. The group will be described in detail in section 2.4. Weekly drop-in sessions were created on Webex to offer a safe space where to socialize with other students and will be run throughout the next months as well.

##### **1.2. Environment & Sustainability**

In November, HISA launched a regional activity across UHI called “HISA Nature Explorer”. This project aimed to improve student life by boosting mental health and physical exercise, while promoting interaction with nature. Students were equipped with a free nature explorer kit containing tools and information about Scottish flora and fauna. Four separate competitions were launched (Best Landscape Photo, Best Wildlife Photo, Best Green Selfie, Most Distance Covered), showing encouraging engagement rates from Orkney as well. HISA Orkney facilitated a dialogue between the regional team and OC staff in order to make the College part of a new debate in regard to environment and sustainability. The matter will be addressed in HISA’s Sustainable Food Policy, aiming to reduce UHI AP’s carbon footprint.

### **1.3. Learning resources**

After the recruitment and training of class representatives, the first class reps meeting took place in mid-December. This was an excellent occasion to gather student feedback. The main issues, addressed by several representatives, concerned learning resources. Negative feedback was presented to HISA in regard to the difficulty of accessing academic texts not available online through the Click & Collect service kindly offered by OC library. This service appears not to be suitable for many Orkney students, deeply affecting the accessibility of learning resources. The issue was brought up by HISA Orkney to HISA Executive Committee in the hope to get a regional perspective on the subject. A regional plan was appointed, and further local actions were suggested. Feedback was presented to the class reps to keep them updated on the matter, which will be followed up in January 2021. In light of the new lockdown, HISA Orkney will look into solutions which accommodate access to learning resources in regards to the various student cohorts.

## **2. KEY ACTIVITIES**

### **2.1. Events**

Several events took place on a local and regional scale over the course of November and December, among which the already cited HISA Nature Explorer and Tea & Chat sessions. An International Students Day Quiz was hosted, as well as a HISA Festive Seasons Across the World event, sharing the beauty of diversity across UHI. HISA Presents, the festive special comedy night, was unfortunately cancelled due to the poor registrations turnout. On the other hand, the Wee University Challenge Spin-Off noticeably increased student engagement rates over the end of the semester. On the occasion of Christmas Jumper Day, HISA Orkney and OC Marketing & Communication Team coordinated the output of social media content to promote Save the Children across the campuses. The UHI Jumper Day Competition was also promoted, increasing the students' turnout to the virtual activity. HISA CON, the biggest event of the year, will take place online from the 25<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 2021 and will be open to all students. Information is being made available to students online at the moment.

### **2.2. Student support**

Student support was proven to be an essential, ever-changing component of the student experience over the last few months, and it is where HISA Orkney is directing most of its time and efforts right now. An intense pattern of collaboration with OC was established, creating effective communication towards the achievement of shared goals. Firstly, HISA Orkney was included by OC's principal, professor Edward Abbott-Alpin, in the promotion of traveling and testing information to all non-local students, helping them to access support and stay safe during the pandemic. Secondly, OC staff fundamentally contributed to

coordinating student support actions, as well as making HISA Orkney's vouchers available to students at the reception. The purpose of the latest was to offer to all non-local students staying in the islands over the Christmas break gift chosen from The Orcadian Bookshop in the hope of cheering up their stay in Orkney. Finally, looking at student support from a regional and national perspective, HISA Orkney actively contributed to HISA's Continued Support for Erasmus + policy and campaign.

### **2.3. Class representatives**

Between November and December, the class representatives' recruitment came to an end and the training was completed after that. The date of the first meeting was established and the agendas were sent out along with the invitations. Although turnout rates were encouraging, a second session of recruitment and training will be planned in the next weeks, to increase the number of OC representatives. Feedback from the student representatives immediately pointed out to a couple of fragilities in the learning environment and will be tackled in the next weeks by HISA Orkney in close partnership with OC and the regional team when necessary.

### **2.4. Clubs & societies**

As mentioned above, a new society is being created at the moment by HISA Orkney in collaboration with Heriot-Watt university. This will be a Walking & Wellbeing group open to UHI and Heriot-Watt Orkney students and will organize regular walks outdoors. The government rules and guidelines will be followed and in order to keep everyone safe, two students will be trained as Covid-officers. The making of the group is in progress and will come to an end in the next weeks. A second society, Shelf-Indulgence, focussing on literature, is in the process of being created as well, through collaboration with the previous HISA Orkney officer. To promote the group, forty book vouchers were given to students in December, in the hope of creating an interest in the initiative. Further groups ideas arose from the last class representatives meeting and will be followed up in the near future.