

Item 6

College Management Council Sub-committee: 15 March 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 January and February 2021.

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

James Wylie, Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, extension 2401,
Email: james.wylie@orkney.gov.uk.

Edward Abbott-Halpin, College Principal, Orkney College, telephone 569250,
Email: edward.abbott-halpin@orkney.uhi.ac.uk.

8. Appendix

Appendix 1: Paper from Highlands and Islands Students Association.

1. KEY ISSUES

The start of the second semester brought along both significant challenges and improvements in the student experience at OC UHI. Among these, issues related to student engagement and student accommodation were the most common. The ultimate goal of HISA Orkney was that of achieving a good balance between HISA's regional and local dimensions, specifically supporting the OC student body while still contributing to and drawing from the regional framework.

1.1. Student Accommodation

HISA Orkney was contacted by a handful of students in relation to rent rebates. The further gathering of student opinions confirmed the general worry over rent expenses for the student body. HISA Orkney reached out to the regional team to draft a student support plan and redirected students to Hardship Funds and ESF Emergency Study Funds via student email and social media posts. Those students who personally got in touch with the depute were sent individual emails to update them on the process and close the feedback loop.

1.2. Student Engagement

HISA Orkney has been facing significant challenges with local student engagement due to the necessity to devolve large amounts of time and energy to regional events such as HISA Con in the first half of the semester. The social media output has also been affected and will be affected by the student elections taking place in February and March. During this period, the online content will be exclusively managed by the HISA Orkney SAC, as the depute is temporarily banned from HISA platforms to ensure equality between the candidates running for the post. HISA Orkney has contacted student groups and local bodies to plan activities and events in the hope of reviving student engagement throughout the next months. More details about this are available in section 2.4. Class reps have vitally contributed to the investigation of the reasons for such low rates of engagement and of the most effective ways to tackle them.

1.3. Class reps and Student Concerns

Positive feedback was received from class reps in regard to learning resources and communication with lecturers. Overall, the student body has witnessed a significant improvement in the learning experience over the last couple of months, feeling adequately supported. Issues related to OC physical resources (lights in the Art department, lockers in the Hospitality department) were reported to the relevant committee so that action could be taken and accounted for to class reps. Issues related to accommodation, social isolation,

wellbeing, and support staff were discussed, providing HISA Orkney with a detailed series of action points for the next month.

2. KEY ACTIVITIES

The period stretching from January to February has been dense of events across UHI, announcing an even busier time over the next months. HISA's regional council was rapidly followed by student elections, while Refreshers is currently being arranged. The student body is being actively involved in the crafting of such events through close collaboration with class reps.

2.1. HISA CON

HISA Con, the regional student council, took place online between the 25th and 29th of January, allowing socialization between students of the different academic partners. The overarching theme was that of 'The Changing World of Employability', and as a consequence of this, related talks, workshops, and seminars were offered to students. HISA Con approached the subject in a variety of ways, starting by looking at UHI to then explore the wider horizon of employability on a national scale. Students had the chance to interact with employers (NHS Highland, HIE, Highland Council, MG Alba, Skills Development Scotland) and MSPs while developing new skills and shaping the student experience at UHI through voting for/against the motions submitted by fellow students and officers. Among these motions, that of *International Student Support Over Brexit*, submitted by the Orkney depute, was voted to become one of the next year's policies and was greeted with significant enthusiasm. Regional and local accountability sessions were held for all officers, to ensure transparency in the democratic approach that HISA has towards the student body.

2.2. Student Elections

Student elections have been requiring and are currently requiring significant amounts of time and energy to ensure Orkney Students are represented fairly across the partnership. HISA Orkney SAC had closely collaborated with OC staff to promote these: student emails, texts, social media content and the OC Newsletter are currently advertising this opportunity. Encouraging rates of student interest towards local and regional posts are being registered at the moment. Voting will be taking place between the 15th and the 19th of March.

2.3. Groups & Societies

HISA Orkney is currently collaborating with the Orkney Archaeology Student Society in the creation of new events such as photography and art competitions. These will be as inclusive as possible, targeting students across Orkney, Scotland, and the wider international cohort. Sign-up sheets for the Walking and Wellbeing and Book club will be shortly circulated among students through class reps to make engagement more effective. Students have displayed

significant interest in outdoor activities, providing HISA Orkney with further food for thought.

2.4. Events

After HISA Con, HISA Orkney has been collaborating with Shetland, Moray, and Lewis Castle's teams to organize a series of quizzes open to the entire partnership. These will take place on Friday 26th February, Friday 5th March, and Friday 26th March.

Furthermore, HISA Orkney is currently organizing a series of online storytelling evenings to be offered to students to enhance the appreciation of Scotland and Orkney's identity, folklore and history. An art competition and online gallery will be linked to these sessions. Online competitions lead by the Orkney Archaeology Student Society in partnership with HISA will take place too, ensuring a variety of events throughout March and April. These will be paired with those appointed in the regional calendar.