

Item: 8

College Management Council Sub-committee: 22 August 2022.

Highlands and Islands Students' Association – Update.

Report by Corporate Director for 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 (HISA), attached as Appendix 1 to this report, outlining the following matters:

- New Depute.
- Elections.
- Plan for coming year.
- Student Voice Reps.
- Students' Welcome Week.

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, a written report is presented from the Highlands and Islands Student Association in a style decided by the students.

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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8. Appendix

Appendix 1: Paper from Highlands and Islands Students Association.

Highlands and Islands Students' Association

12th August 2022

HISA Orkney – CMC report

1. New depute

The newly elected depute Susan Taylor is a full-time 3rd year Archaeology and Environmental Studies student. She has been in post for five weeks, much of which has been spent undergoing extensive training :

- NUS Lead & Change and sparqs 'That's Quality' external events involving workshops and presentations with representatives from other organisations and academic institutions.
- HISA all staff and officer conference and Exec Training residential events including relationship building, problem solving, setting achievable goals and measuring progress.

2. Elections

Please see the report already submitted by Elliot Stradling

3. Plan for the coming year

A plan for the year is under construction with action areas including those below to be prioritised and smart processed.

- Accommodation for both HE and FE students (particularly those from the outer isles)
- Engagement of FE students with HISA
- Building confidence for students returning to face-to-face classes

4. Student Voice Reps

As well as the issues above, Susan will continue HISA's work on the recruitment and training of SVR's, particularly for FE students.

5. Students' Welcome Week

A week of events is being planned in early October to welcome not only new students but also those returning to in-person learning after Covid.

2022 HISA Elections Orkney College Board of Management Report

Executive Summary

HISA conducted elections for 19 roles across the UHI region, four of which could be voted on by Orkney College students: HISA Regional President, HISA Regional Vice-President Communities, HISA Regional Vice-President Education and HISA Orkney College Depute-President. These elections were conducted partly under Covid restrictions, with some of the candidate recruitment, campaigning and voting, taking place virtually. All four roles were successfully recruited for.

The election performance at Orkney College saw a 1.50% turnout across all modes of study, while turnout across all of UHI was 2.18%. Orkney College had the 2nd lowest turnout per unit of population, of any Academic Partner during the 2022 election.

Introduction

Under the 1994 Education Act, each further and higher education establishment is required to have a Students' Association that elects its officers through a fair and democratic election. HISA's Articles of Associations states HISA must hold elections for 3 Regional Officers (President, Vice-President Communities, and Vice-President Education) and at least one representative from each academic partner.

The 2022 elections were held between 27th January and 18th March 2022. Due to Covid restrictions, HISA took measures to support the election process by conducting all of the candidate training and support, online. Furthermore, last year's election system brought in new elements that were not available previously, such as the turnout dashboard and the fast-track email function, which HISA has continued to utilise in the 2022 elections.

HISA uses the Single Transferable Vote system, following the Electoral Reform Society guidance. Voters select candidates in order of preference for each role they are able to vote for. HISA's website, provided by One Digital, has a built-in E-Voting module that allows HISA to conduct our elections entirely online. For every role in the election, voters had the option to Re-Open Nominations (RON,) should they wish to reject the candidates on the ballot and call for the election to be re-run.

Posts and Results Summary

Elections for the following positions were held concurrently, resulting in the corresponding individuals being elected. Full results for each role are detailed in the [results section](#).

| Position | Elected | Candidates* |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| HISA President | Heather Innes | 2 |
| HISA Vice-President Communities | Madeleine Brown | 1 |
| HISA Vice-President Education | Jun Hu | 1 |
| Orkney College President | Susan Taylor | 2 |

*The option of Re-Open Nominations (RON) is not included in candidate numbers. Voters had the option to vote for (RON) in addition to any candidate.

Elections Co-ordination and Oversight

The 2022 Elections were overseen by National Union of Students, who served as our Returning Officer. The Returning Officer is responsible for the good governance of the election on behalf of HISA's Board of Trustees, to make judgements on appeals, and to give guidance to the Depute Returning Officer as and when required. Appointed internally, Anna Templeton served as our Depute Returning Officer. This role is designed to manage the election process and make formal decisions regarding rules and regulations, including the ability to disqualify any candidate. This role also oversees the delivery of the elections project.

Elliot Stradling served as Elections Co-ordinator, leading on the operational delivery of the elections project across the UHI region, organising training for staff/candidates and advising staff throughout the elections process. 3 members of the Student Voice and Advocacy team, along with the Communications Manager and HISA Chief Executive, supported the elections process throughout. Local staff were responsible for the implementation and delivery of the elections locally: promoting the elections to students, engaging with local college staff, recruitment of candidates, delivering local training to candidates, supporting the voting process and announcement of results to Local candidates.

Elections Process

| | |
|--|--|
| Nominations Open | 27 th January 2022 (10:00) |
| Nominations Close* | 25 th February 2022 (14:00) |
| Announcement of Candidates | 25 th February 2022 (16:00) |
| Rules, Ethics and Campaigning Candidate Training | 28 th February 2022 (12:00) |
| | 1 st March 2022 (18:00) |
| | 2 nd March 2022 (10:00) |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Video Training | (Provided to candidates via email) |
| Regional/Local Awareness Training | (Various sessions throughout March) |
| Voting Opens | 14 th March (10:00) |
| Voting Closes | 18 th March (13:00) |
| Results Announced | 18 th March (16:00) |

* Nominations were due to close on 22nd February, however due to 2 of the positions not having any nominations, as well as a concern that nominees for uncontested positions might drop out, nominations were extended to 25th February for all roles.

Nominations

HISA undertook nominations entirely online via a Microsoft Form available through the HISA Website. All the information we required from students at this stage (including an option to submit their photo and manifesto) were provided through this form. The table below provides details on the number of nominations received at the close of the nominations period. Prior to and during nominations, drop-in sessions were run for any student that was thinking of standing but were unsure of what it might entail or how they might go about nominating themselves.

The table below provides the number of nominations received at the close of the period.

| Position | Nominations Received | Number of Candidates at voting week |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| HISA President | 2 | 2 |
| HISA Vice-President Communities | 1 | 1 |
| Vice-President Education | 2 | 1 |
| Orkney College President | 2 | 2 |

Preparing the Candidates

Candidates received training materials electronically, with training sessions conducted entirely on Microsoft Teams. All Candidates were invited to live training sessions: The Rules, Ethics and Campaigning Training, which was available to all students and attended by 20 candidates across 3 days, Regional Awareness training which was only available to Regional candidates and was attended by 4 candidates, and Local Awareness Training which was led by local staff; attendance for these sessions varied over the academic partners. As well as these training sessions, candidates were provided with video training via email so they had the option to access it at their own convenience.

The concept behind the Rules, Ethics and Campaigning training was to enhance candidates' ability to reach out to students, while the regional and local training was designed to

provide candidates with an enhanced picture of the local nature of their academic partner, while giving regional candidates a wider picture of UHI as a whole.

Throughout the supported campaign period, candidates' materials were uploaded to the HISA website, enabling students to make informed decisions ahead of voting week. These materials included candidate images, manifestos, videos and posters (where provided.) These materials remained live until voting had closed, in an effort to promote considered voting choices.

Voting

When live, voting was advertised clearly on multiple areas of the HISA website. On the homepage, a large banner featuring the Student Elections design linked directly to the UnionCloud voting application, as did a 'vote now!' heading in the top menu and a page within the Student Elections information hub. As well as this, there was an 'unable to vote?' button which led students to a form where they could report any issues they were experiencing while trying to vote.

Students were emailed a direct fast-track voting link to their UHI emails on the first day of voting week, which gave them a one-click route to their ballot paper, by-passing the login process. Emails were also utilised locally to engage staff and Senior Management Team support in encouraging voters. Unlike in previous years, HISA did not organise class visits for the candidates. Instead, students were offered the opportunity to record hustings' videos where they answered the following questions:

- If you could only achieve 1 thing from your manifesto, what would it be?
- If elected, how would you keep students up to date on your work, and be accountable to them?
- What would you do to make students more enthusiastic about giving feedback on their student life?
- What is the biggest issue that you think is affecting students right now that not enough people are talking about?
- If you could turn into another person, who would you be and why?

This was intended to give the students an opportunity to promote themselves and their campaign to students in a slightly less formal and more engaging way.

Virtual polling stations were set up alongside physical polling stations in order to engage students both online and in person, with the hopes that this would help us reach as wide a demographic of students as possible. HISA also managed class visits with local staff members, facilitating the need to engage a captive audience of students, while reducing the number of requests lecturers might receive from candidates.

Once voting had closed, HISA provided voters with the opportunity to give feedback on the voting process, receiving 227 responses. When asked how they found out about the elections 179 cited emails, while 132 cited that the candidate's manifestos were the main

way in which candidates caught their attention. Students gave an average score of 4.14 out of 5 when asked to rate the voting process and 61% students said they were somewhat likely or very likely to engage with HISA in the future.

Marketing

The messaging of the 2022 Student Elections Campaign revolved around positive language that encouraged students to take a proactive stance in improving the student experience. Alongside the core and key word designs, HISA staff were provided with Microsoft Teams background images that they were encouraged to use throughout various stages in this election cycle. This aimed to help promote and raise awareness for the elections and HISA as an organisation.

In conjunction with this, each of the designs were produced bilingually with the Gaelic translation present on each material and approved by the HISA Gaelic Communities Coordinator. By increasing the presence of Gaelic in the Student Elections campaign, HISA was subsequently better able to engage with students studying at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and remind voters across the partnership that they are studying in a community where Gaelic is spoken.

During the Student Elections period, a variety of communications activity was undertaken to support the campaign and maximise student engagement. This included utilisation of the HISA website, local and regional social media channels, MyDay and email.

Complaints

One complaint was received regarding the HISA Regional President position. However, this complaint was not upheld. No complaints were received regarding the Orkney College local role or any of the other regional roles. The Regional President complaint was appealed to the Returning Officer at NUS. This appeal was submitted after the close of voting and the Returning Officer made the decision that the appeal was to be rejected on the grounds that it did not impact the results of the election.

Results

Table 1 details the result of the Presidential election. Heather Innes was elected for her first term in this role.

Table 1: HISA Regional President Election Result

| Candidate | Votes | Elected? |
|--------------------|-------|----------|
| Heather Innes | 320 | Yes |
| Ruth McFadyen | 268 | No |
| Reopen Nominations | 28 | No |

| | | |
|-------------------|---|-----|
| Spoilt | 1 | N/A |
| Non-Transferable | 0 | N/A |
| Differential Loss | 0 | N/A |

Table 2 details the result of the Vice-Presidential Education election. Jun Hu was elected for his first term in this role. The only other candidate for this role withdrew before voting week began.

Table 2: HISA Regional Vice-President Education Election Result

| Candidate | Votes | Elected? |
|--------------------|-------|----------|
| Jun Hu | 499 | Yes |
| Reopen Nominations | 138 | No |
| Spoilt | 2 | N/A |
| Non-Transferable | 0 | N/A |
| Differential Loss | 0 | N/A |

Table 3 details the result of the Vice-Presidential Communities election. Madeleine Brown was elected for her first term in this role.

Table 3: HISA Regional Vice-President Communities Election Result

| Candidate | Votes | Elected? |
|--------------------|-------|----------|
| Madeleine Brown | 511 | Yes |
| Reopen Nominations | 89 | No |
| Spoilt | 1 | N/A |
| Non-Transferable | 0 | N/A |
| Differential Loss | 0 | N/A |

Table 4 details the result of the Orkney College President Election. Susan Taylor was elected for her first term in this role.

Table 4: Orkney College Depute President Election Result

| Candidate | Votes | Elected? |
|--------------------|-------|----------|
| Susan Taylor | 15 | Yes |
| Lynda Baird | 11 | No |
| Reopen Nominations | 0 | No |
| Spoilt | 0 | N/A |
| Non-Transferable | 0 | N/A |
| Differential Loss | 0 | N/A |

Historic Election Overview

Table 5 details the past performance of Orkney College during HISA elections. The 2022 election turnout was the lowest in the last five years. This can be partially attributed to the continuation of Covid restrictions at certain Academic Partners, the lack of face-to-face voter

engagement as a result of a reduced number of students on campuses and a noticeable decline in student interest and overall engagement. The voter share (the percentage of Orkney College Students vs all UHI students,) recorded a lower result than in the last election, but higher than in the 2020 elections.

Table 6 details the number of unused votes there were for each of the 3 Regional roles, as well as for all depute president roles. From this data we can see that there were fewer unused votes than there has been in any of the past 4 elections.

Table 7 highlights candidate numbers. 2022 saw an increase in candidates for Orkney College Depute President when compared to last year's election but less than in 2020 & 2019.

Table 8 highlights the election engagement for the role of Orkney College Depute President. This table shows in even greater detail, the lack of student engagement in regards to the 2022 election, with a steady decline in voters and turnout since 2019.

Local Reflection

Although the current Covid restrictions and lack of student engagement did have a negative impact on this year's elections, Orkney College had a lot of support from the offset. The Orkney local staff team played a key role in raising engagement and assisting in the delivery of a fair and balanced election.

Although students were unable to conduct class visits themselves, local staff reached out to curriculum staff at the earliest opportunity to arrange class visits during the elections period, so that HISA local staff could speak to as many students as possible and encourage them to vote.

The elections period also saw HISA create targeted and consistent messaging to Student Voice Representatives, clubs and society leaders, the wider student body and all staff, which we feel helped increase the number of students who stood for local positions and the turnout we had in a mostly online year.

The overall turnout has noticeably declined in comparison to previous years. This decline in votes, candidate nominations and overall engagement was noted in the 2021 election but it has continued to decline in the 2022 election. This in part could be attributed to the lack of face-to-face engagement and on-campus presence we had this year, however, increasing engagement on all fronts should be a key focus as we move towards the 2023 election.

Moving forward we aim to strengthen our already good working relationships with Orkney College staff, continue to use targeted and consistent communications and work in partnership with key staff to increase awareness and engagement in the elections process. We will, as always, continue to consider new ways to engage with a wide range of students and seek to improve engagement with class visits (hopefully Covid restrictions will continue to be reduced and allow for candidates to enter classes themselves next year) and an increase in on-campus students. We will look to ensure we are able to have a strong presence on campus for the 2023 election, as long as government and Academic Partner

guidelines allow. Creating more awareness on campus and helping to strengthen engagement with students through various different means, will be an important outcome of a reduction in restrictions.

Appendices

Table 5: Overall Past Election Performance at Orkney College

| Orkney College UHI | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Voters | 118 | 66 | 90 | 28 |
| Turnout | 7.89% | 3.89% | 7.55% | 1.50% |
| Voter Share | 4.32% | 2.62% | 5.38% | 3.71% |
| Student Numbers | 1496 | 1696 | 1192 | 1870 |
| Orkney Students as a Percentage of UHI | 5.70% | 5.78% | 5.14% | 6.07% |

Table 6: Unused Votes by UHI Students

| Unused Votes | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| Did not vote for President | 693 | 509 | 370 | 139 |
| | 25.36% | 20.18% | 22.13% | 18.41% |
| Did not vote for Vice-President Further Education* | 819 | 622 | 370 | 155 |
| | 29.97% | 24.66% | 22.13% | 20.53% |
| Did not vote for Vice-President Higher Education** | 750 | 639 | 350 | 118 |
| | 27.44% | 25.34% | 20.93% | 15.63% |
| Did not vote for Depute President | 63 | 18 | 32 | 15 |
| | 2.31% | 0.71% | 1.91% | 1.99% |

*For the 2022 election, this role was changed to Vice-President Communities

**For the 2022 election, this role was changed to Vice-President Education

Table 7: Candidate Numbers

| Role | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| President | 5 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| Vice-President Further Education* | 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Vice President Higher Education** | 6 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| Orkney College Depute President | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 |

*For the 2022 election, this role was changed to Vice-President Communities

**For the 2022 election, this role was changed to Vice-President Education

Table 8: Orkney College Students Votes for HISA Orkney College Depute President

| Orkney College Students Votes for HISA Depute President for Orkney College UHI | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Votes | 104 | 55 | 78 | 26 |
| Turnout | 6.95% | 3.24% | 6.54% | 1.39% |