



# Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) 2024 - 26

## 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 (UHI), including our academic partners, and Your Students' Association (YSA), 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.

## Our university community

The University and YSA 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. Our current Strategic Plan 2030, , entitled 'where learning means more', highlights our position as:

- **Inclusive.** We are proud to be different. Where learning means more. We offer flexible and supported learning from access level to PhD. Where students can start where they need to and progress as far as they want at a pace that is right for them; all within the same institution. The future world of work will require us to be constantly learning, so whatever the stage of life or current qualification, we provide everyone with the opportunity to keep their skills relevant and up to date.
- Home of connected learning. We take the best of our growing academic reputation, world-class research and our proud history of vocational training to join the world of learning to the world of work. We involve industry experts to ensure our courses teach the skills employers are looking for and match these to our students' ambitions. Our established blended learning approach connects our student community here and across the world.
- Supportive, caring and personal. We take time to help our students find their unique learner journey. We care passionately not just about our students and staff but also our regions, people, communities and future prosperity. We believe that every individual has the right to feel valued, our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is not just a moral obligation, but it is also fundamental to our aim of providing flexible and supported learning opportunities.
- Regions of world-class research quality. All across our area we have centres of excellence and world-class thinking that are pushing the boundaries of academic and

applied knowledge, where staff and students are playing a part in changing our regions and the world.

Our student body is central to that purpose and vision. Both the University and YSA 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.

### **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 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 (YSA), although students may wish to opt out. The university and YSA 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.
- 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, compliments, 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.

## **Your Students' Association**

YSA 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 YSA 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.
- Volunteering as a Student Voice Rep (SVR).

## **Key performance indicators (KPIs)**

We have agreed several KPIs in relation to section A of this agreement. We will publish data on:

1. Number of student voice reps
2. Course coverage
3. Percentage of reps trained

## Part B Partnership working in 2024 - 2026

### Work themes during the life of this agreement

The University and YSA agree to partner on a number of work themes for the duration of this agreement. There are four permanent categories of work themes, each with a permanent university lead. Under these themes, between one and two specific targets are set within each theme for development during the life of the agreement. To progress these targets, working groups will develop action plans. We will report on progress towards each theme regularly through the university and YSA websites and student newsletters.

**Targets may be viewed in appendix one** and are regularly reviewed throughout the period of this agreement.

Targets are developed through an evidence – based process through the review of:

- Student surveys
- Student Voice Rep feedback
- YSA officer manifestos
- Sectoral trends
- Institutional strategies and targets
- YSA Annual Meetings / Conference, which additionally reviews all targets.

Targets will:

- Clearly specify the underlying issue to be addressed
- The impact of planned interventions
- How changes will be measured

### Ongoing work themes

In addition to the annual work themes, there are also a number of ongoing areas of work that the University and YSA work in partnership on. These ongoing areas work include annual teaching awards, student mental health, sport and environmental issues and wellbeing. We will publish details of work undertaken in regular updates. Students are encouraged to read social media updates from YSA and the monthly student e-newsletter from the university to find out about opportunities to participate in this work. We will also support elected officers to deliver their election manifestos.

Details of ongoing areas of partnership working are as follows:

**Student Mental Health Agreement.** The University YSA is committed to supporting the mental of our students. This document has been developed by the University's Mental Health and Counselling Manager, the Student Association Mental Health Coordinator, and YSA; together with feedback from students across the partnership. The agreement sets out a number of actions that are taking through the life of the document to better support student mental health.

**Healthy Body Healthy Mind** supports colleges and universities in improving student and staff well-being and inspires positive changes on campus. In receiving an Award, institutions demonstrate how they are encouraging sport and physical activity, a smoke-free culture and

good mental health. The scheme is run by Scottish Student Sport, in partnership with ASH Scotland, NUS Scotland, and SAMH. [Find out more on our website.](#)

**Sporting Blues.** The university and YSA work together to recognise our students competing in elite sports. The annual sporting blues awards are an opportunity to nominate a student for recognition of their sporting success.

**YSA Awards.** The annual teaching awards are an opportunity for students to nominate a member of staff, or student volunteer who they appreciate. These popular awards provide recognition for those making a difference to the student experience.

Local work themes.

Academic partners may develop local agreements based on the template supplied by the EO Student Services team, and originally developed by Inverness UHI.

## Part C Report of Partnership Working in 2022

This section of the Student Partnership Agreement provides a report on work completed towards partnership working themes in the 2022 agreement.

The Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) 2022 runs throughout the calendar year, from January to December 2022. The SPA details how students (as represented by the student's association) and the university will work in partnership. In addition to the regular areas of work, three areas are chosen for particular focus during the year. This year, they comprise:

1. Disability support, awareness and accessibility.
2. Socialising, connectivity and community.
3. Environment and green sustainability.

Progress has been made towards all these goals in throughout the year. Work within the area of disability awareness and support has included better awareness of the many resources that have been put in place in this area. Induction information now includes disability support links, and this was also shared with inclusive practitioners. Personal Learning Support Plan staff guidance and staff-facing Inclusive Practice Toolkit resource are also now signposted.

Staff have also considered how they promote their availability and services to students, and the membership of our Inclusive Practitioners Network reviewed. Continued improvement is very much encouraged, and student survey and PLSP feedback is reviewed to identify areas for enhancement. It would also be worth noting that an extensive toolkit for staff working in the area of disability has been released, and consideration given to ensuring common practice across the partnership. The website has been reviewed with links to support information embedded in induction materials. Students with any comments of concerns about inclusive practice may use the red button feedback service.

Preparations are underway for this year's Healthy Body, Healthy Mind events. Awareness days throughout the year are also promoted through the various communication channels. Most work in relation to mental health is detailed within our Student Mental Health Agreement. Significant progress has also been made on securing the various aspects of our student counselling service that are available across the university.

The university is also supporting connectivity and community, in particular regarding assisting students to build academic communities. A seminar for academic staff to provide the knowledge to support academic – related student societies was run. We also provided self – help resources for students to set up peer support study groups. Social activities have also been developed with work taken place throughout the year to enhance the social experience of students studying within our halls of residence.

An online seminar series called The Sustainability Sessions has been introduced, covering various topics relating to environment and sustainability. Sessions are delivered by invited guest speakers and have included 'Hedgehog Friendly Campuses' and Zero Waste Scotland. The university is also encouraging use of guidance for academic teams to consider environmental issues when selecting recourses for reading lists. We are encouraged that work

in this area has generated considerable interest within the student community and is regarded as the single item that students most wish to be involved with.

This semester, the Group has been relaunched as the 'Green Champions Network'. Rather than a committee, the network is open to all students and staff who want to be kept up to date with green initiatives, take part in events, and discuss green issues and share practice with others from across the university. The university now has designated staff to lead our response to net zero, and the new approach of the network will better enable students to engage with this work.

---

## **Part D Signatures**

University Principal and Vice Chancellor  
Date:

Students' Association President  
Date: