



HISA Strategic Plan 2020-2023 (Final Version*)

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Introduction

The HISA Strategic Plan sets out the Association's strategic direction over the next three years. It comes at a crucial time in HISA's development. HISA is incredibly proud of all its achievements to date but recognises the work to be done in achieving its vision. This, only HISA's second strategic plan, aims to inspire our students, officers, and staff. It will showcase our ambitions to our funders and members and highlight our charitable purpose. It represents a brand-new strategic planning cycle and dynamic approach whereby the plan is reviewed and updated every year.

Purpose – Why are we here?

HISA's purpose is clear - *"To support and enhance the student experience of every student in every part of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) Partnership."* Put simply HISA's job is to change students' lives for the better. Inside and outside the classroom, workshop, studio, living room, HISA exists to ensure that all students regardless of geography, study mode or personal circumstances have the best possible time studying at UHI that they can.

Values

Everything HISA does should be enshrined in our primary values:

- Student-Driven
- Supportive
- Sustainable

- Inclusive

What are HISA's ambitions as an organisation?

HISA is an ambitious entity, both for its students and itself. HISA wants to be the best it possibly can be to deliver for its students. HISA has set out the following ambitions:

- We will be the most innovative Students Association (SA) in the UK, reinventing SA traditions for a tertiary context in an online world and vast geographical area.
- We will be integral and assertive partners to UHI and its academic partners
- We will be locally focussed and nationally recognised for our expertise

We will do this by providing support for students locally, achieving results for all students regionally and influencing nationally to the benefit of the whole student body.

How will HISA accomplish its purpose and ambition?

This Strategic Plan will not be a static document, instead of incorporating an annual rolling programme of change, review and strategic analysis that ensures HISA is always looking to the future and has plans in place both in the long and short term.

HISA has set out firm ambitions split into three themes to enable this. Each theme has short-term (1 year) objectives and longer-term aims (2 -4 year)

Our relationship with the University and its Partners

HISA is a very different Students' Association compared to its counterparts in other Universities and Colleges. This is because UHI is a very different type of University. The fact that you can walk into UHI with no qualification and walk out with a PhD makes it a very special institution.

We are proud to be part of UHI and its academic partners however UHI is complex, and as a result, our relationship with it is also complex. UHI has 13 academic partners, which, while all part of the UHI family, are unique in their own way. We advocate on behalf of our members to all of them. We rely on the University and its academic partners for the buildings we occupy, IT support and for on-going funding for HISA.

At HISA we embrace a proactive partnership approach to working with UHI and all its partners. This means:

- Ensuring the student voice inputs to strategic level decision making in UHI and all its partners
- Supplying insight and evidence into the University's and academic partner's quality processes
- Contributing to policy and delivery changes ensuring they are made with students' best interests at the centre
- Questioning the University and its academic partners if they get things wrong, and pressuring them to do the right thing through lobbying, campaigns, and student action
- Working closely and jointly on key projects like student engagement, student experience, retention, and employability

Strategic Theme 1:

Advocacy

To enhance the academic experience, represent our members, and widen their rights

1: Improving UHI and its Partners

Introduction: To improve the student experience HISA must help UHI and the academic partners achieve their ambitions. HISA mustn't just have a long-term plan for improving itself but also to help improve the Partnership.

Context: UHI is unique in the UK in its scope, structures, and remit. It is both young and old. It is the newest University in Scotland but some of its academic partners have existed for decades. As an institution, it was not designed from the top down but instead grew organically over a long time. Its tertiary nature makes it special but also mean that it does not always "fit" perfectly into the sector around it.

UHI has recognised that its structures can be complex, can impede progress and be inefficient. HISA wants to help change this and ensure UHI fulfils its potential. HISA will assist UHI in achieving its own strategic goals.

Ambitions

1. The University of the Highlands and Islands will be the United Kingdom's leading integrated university, encompassing further and higher education
2. UHI will be recognised for the quality of its students' experience and their achievement
3. UHI worldwide reputation will be built upon its innovative approach to learning and its distinctive research and curriculum, enriched by the people, natural environment, economy, culture and heritage of our region and its communities
4. UHI will be locally based, regional in structure and have national and international reach

In 2020/21 HISA will:

- A. Be integral to the next phase of UHI's Strategic Planning process and assist the University in the creation of a new Partnership wide plan
- B. Work with UHI to improve the student experience, SSES and NSS scores
- C. Work with UHI and embrace the change program ensuring there is parity in the Student Experience and the Partnership is financially sustainable
- D. Work with UHI on the Student Partnership Agreement incorporating projects and work streams prioritised by the students
- E. Ensure Covid-19 has a minimal negative impact on student voice and experience

In 2021-2023 HISA will:

- I. Assist the University and Partners in creating a new Governance Structure for the whole Partnership
- II. Assist the University and Partners in streamlining its SMT structures
- III. Support the University in the implementation of its new Strategic Plan
- IV. Support the University in becoming sector leading in online/blended learning in the Post Covid 19 world
- V. Secure strong connections with UHI and the academic partners to be an effective advocate for the student voice

2: Student Representatives at the Heart of UHI, the Partners and HISA

Introduction: The student officers and representatives are integral to HISA operating effectively. HISA has a responsibility to ensure that its officers and reps are supported and that the HISA voice is the student voice.

Context: HISA's officer structures are based on UHI's structures but HISA is not governed in the same way as UHI. HISA's structures have worked well during its start-up phase but must now evolve in a way that works for HISA, UHI, the partners and, crucially, its students. The balance between local and regional decision making is key.

HISA inherited a multitude of Class/Student Rep systems. Most are now run in partnership with the local institution but there is a high level of inconsistency that needs to be addressed. Ensuring that the rep system and the student voice functions online is more key than ever.

Ambitions

1. HISA, working in partnership with the academic partners and UHI, will run an effective, accessible and democratic representative system region-wide that takes into account all learning modes and demographics
2. HISA digital democracy will be sector leading, accessible to all its members and have a real impact
3. HISA will provide top-level training, support and development for its representatives and officers at the local and regional level to ensure a sector-leading student academic and, wider, experience
4. HISA's officer structure will be advanced, effective and reflect the needs of its students, UHI and the Partners
5. Any student who wishes to engage with HISA in Gaelic can do so

In 2020/21 HISA will:

- A. Bring the findings of its Democracy Review to HISA-Con
- B. Work with UHI and the Partners to implement recommendations from the Class Representative Review and develop a HISA Student Voice Strategy
- C. Complete work on the Gaelic Language Project, including confirmation on the extension of the project
- D. Increase engagement in HISA elections and HISA Awards
- E. Review Student engagement at learning centres
- F. Work with UHI, accommodation providers and the Academic Partners to build student voice in halls of residencies

In 2021-2023 HISA will:

- I. Implement the recommendations from the HISA democracy review in consultation with students
- II. Develop systems to monitor the success of the new class representative systems following the new HISA Student Voice strategy
- III. Implement the recommendations from the Gaelic Language Project, and ensure delivery of the Gaelic Language Plan that emanates from it
- IV. Ensure that the student voice can be raised in modern, innovative, and non-traditional ways

3: Campaigns and Advice for Students

Introduction: HISA needs to be able to deliver change for students both inside and outside the academic world. In addition, students who find themselves in difficulty with their course or who are subject to disciplinary action need an independent source of advice and representation.

Context: HISA has run very effective external national campaigns during its start-up phase on student support, EU Students and Peoples vote. Internal regional lobbying has been very successful, but external region-wide campaigning has been more challenging. HISA has had numerous wins internally but needs to have more of an impact outside UHI.

The structures of UHI mean that students can often be confused as to whether their local institution or UHI is responsible for dealing with any issue or complaint they may have. HISA's growth in the area of advice has been slow compared to other parts of the organisation. UHI runs a very efficient "Red Button" service that, amongst other things, performs the role of a traditional student union "safety net" service.

Ambitions

1. HISA becomes the place that students and academics alike recognise as providing independent appropriate and quality support advice on academic and welfare issues
2. HISA will be a vehicle for social change at a local, regional and national level
3. Throughout UHI, officers, volunteers and representatives will work in partnership with academics and the wider staff community to solve problems and provide an evidence base to drive policy change
4. Equality, diversity, and inclusiveness are embedded in all HISA activity
5. We will be an eco-friendly organisation leading the way in environmental sustainability

In 2020/21 HISA will:

- A. Campaign on Black Lives Matter, Liberation, International students, and Climate Change
- B. Develop a dedicated HISA Equality and Diversity Strategy
- C. Run targeted campaigns to enhance and develop local communities and individual academic partners
- D. Develop a bespoke online system for handling casework
- E. Implement policy passed at HISA-Con
- F. Participate in the Green Impact initiative

In 2021-2023 HISA will:

- I. Map existing UHI and academic partner support, finance, and welfare services
- II. Establish an independent and confidential advice service and ensure that it is effectively marketed to students and the whole UHI Partnership UHI

Strategic Theme:

Activities

To create development, welfare, and volunteering opportunities; as well as provide a platform for Clubs, Societies, and member activities

4: Employability, Volunteering, and Accreditation

Introduction: Employability is a key issue for all students. Last year students were clear in their feedback it was the number one issue for them. Formal recognition of volunteering activities undertaken by students alongside their studies is one way of helping students and graduates to differentiate themselves from others in the workplace.

Context: The Partnerships approach to volunteering, employability or accreditation is currently underdeveloped, HISA has been working with the UHI Employability Team to improve this and come up with a more joined-up approach. With the Covid, 19 crises having a negative effect on the jobs market employability for our students is more crucial than ever.

Ambitions

1. HISA will be sector-leading for volunteer provision in the Student Association community
2. HISA will work with the UHI Partnership and other external partners to enhance the employability of students/graduates through their involvement in a recognised and accredited activity scheme
3. To develop employability prospects for all students
4. To attract students to study at UHI through its accreditation, employability, and activities programmes

In 2020/21 HISA will:

- A. Develop a joint HISA/UHI Employability Strategy
- B. Develop a HISA joint HISA/UHI Volunteering Strategy
- C. Create intern and placement opportunities for students at HISA and UHI
- D. Run employability workshops for HISA volunteers, club and society leaders and all students throughout the academic year

E. Work with the University and external stakeholders to create more employment opportunities for students

In 2021-2023 HISA will:

- I. Implement the Employability/Volunteering Strategy
- II. Develop a framework for a successful accreditation program which works for all HISA's volunteers (Including Class Reps)
- III. Develop a volunteering programme for the training, management and support of all HISA volunteers
- IV. Design a volunteer scheme specific to clubs and society leaders

5: Club, Society and Student Opportunity Development

Introduction: HISA has a key role to play in supporting and providing local, regional and national activity and providing links and support between interested students across the Partnership.

Context: HISA aims to provide inclusivity to all activity and student-led sports clubs and societies, regardless of students' locations and study level. HISA recognises the challenges faced by students wishing to participate in organised activity across the UHI Partnership but geographic realities and an incredibly vast demographic should not preclude HISA's ability to deliver a full range of activities.

HISA activities, clubs and societies have been amongst the biggest success stories of HISA's early years. However, there is clear room for growth and expansion. The challenges of social distancing and Covid 19 also mean a different approach will be needed compared to previous years.

Ambitions

1. To provide every student at UHI with the opportunity to take part in extracurricular opportunities
2. To enhance the student social experience across the UHI Partnership
3. To develop clubs, societies and activities that are suitable for UHI students' unique circumstances
4. To ensure any student wishing to set up a club or society can do so locally or regionally
5. To develop societies that are inclusive and attractive to international students

In 2020/21 HISA will:

- A. Work with the UHI Partnership to develop a sports and activities strategy for the University and HISA

- B. Evolve current Policies, Procedures, and grant schemes
- C. Implement a clubs and society development training model for staff and officers
- D. Pilot Sports Ambassadors program
- E. Research opportunities for community development with Clubs and Societies
- F. Support Clubs and Societies through Covid 19 and beyond
- G. Run an Adventure weekend (potentially virtually)

In 2021-2023 HISA will:

- I. Implement sports and activities strategy
- II. Ensure students with accessibility needs have opportunities to partake in multiple activities including sports clubs and societies
- III. Enhance and expand the Adventure club model and similar initiatives
- IV. Work with the UHI Partnership to develop an activities model appropriate for our tertiary demographic

6: Community and Welfare

Introduction: HISA wants every student who studies in any part of the UHI Partnership to feel part of something bigger. We want our students to be healthy and active. Both physical health and the sense of belonging to a community are intrinsically linked to positive mental health.

Context: Student life can be challenging, and all the evidence points to a large increase in the level of mental health support students require. HISA needs to ensure all our students get the support they need. Covid 19 has increased the pressures and stress of students who may feel more isolated than ever.

UHI is full of communities. Students are part of their class, course, college, department UHI, HISA and could be part of a club, society, or campaign. There can be a lot of debate over which communities' students feel part of. The role of HISA is to ensure those communities are positive places and for students to enjoy being part of them.

Ambitions

1. For all UHI students to feel part of a wider community and for HISA to enhance the spirit and ethos of community
2. For every UHI student to be able to access mental health support services when they need to
3. Support the UHI Partnership in creating a whole community that is committed to supporting positive mental health and wellbeing

In 2020/21 HISA will:

- A. Through HISA's online content create an interactive community for its students, including moving freshers online
- B. Evolve HISA-Con
- C. Provide Mental Health training workshops to UHI staff, HISA staff and officers
- D. Lobby the UHI Partnership for improved online Mental Health support
- E. Work with the UHI Partnership to review the UHI wide Student Mental Health Agreement and strategy
- F. Continue to work with "Healthy Body Healthy Mind" initiative

In 2021-2023 HISA will:

- I. Help the UHI Partnership deliver effective student support services which are easy to access, meet the needs of a diverse student body, and are resourced sufficiently to meet demand
- II. Provide training and support for HISA staff relating to mental health and wellbeing, connecting support for staff and students to mutual benefit and foster mutually supportive initiatives amongst staff and students
- III. Run a regional event program for students to have the opportunity to make friends both locally, and regionally
- IV. Work with UHI in nurturing a wider sense of community for its membership across the entire partnership

Strategic Theme 3:

Infrastructure

Ensure HISA has the resources to carry out the strategic plan and is using them efficiently

7: Internal and External Communication

Introduction: For HISA to achieve the outcomes described in the objectives above, an effective communication strategy encompassing a range of digital platforms and approaches will be required both internally and externally.

Context: Communication within the UHI Partnership can be difficult. This is partially down to the complex structures that exist within academic partners that make up UHI and the lack of communication that sometimes exists between the academic partners. HISA must overcome these barriers and communicate to students in a way that is accessible to them. The Covid 19 pandemic means that HISA's online communications must be prioritised.

In addition, HISA's speed of growth means that HISA must evolve communications internally as well. HISA will invest in staff and technology as appropriate to enable students, staff and especially elected representatives at all levels to communicate and be communicated with by HISA.

Ambitions

1. All members know who HISA are, the opportunities, and services it offers and how HISA can help them
2. Members know their role in HISA and feel like they have a stake in their community
3. Members are aware of the causes and consequences of student issues and problems
4. Staff feel part of a team and community
5. Local, regional and national media see HISA as a vital contributor on education and political issues
6. HISA will have clear and effective internal communication channels

In 2020/21 HISA will:

- A. Implement the recommendations from the external communications review
- B. Develop the HISA website into a key student engagement tool
- C. Increase the provision of accessible communications
- D. Complete a dedicated communications strategy

In 2021-2023 HISA will:

- I. Use our communication channels to make HISA democracy more accessible and visible for all students
- II. Create an internal communication process for all student campaigns and events
- III. Create an annual HISA Student Survey
- IV. Create Internal Comms training program/module

8: HISA People

Introduction: Without effective staff support and resources, HISA will not be able to support the Regional Officers, Local Officers, and local representative structures outlined in the plan above. Permanent staff provide continuity, expertise and vital support to the work of the elected officers and are essential to the success of HISA.

Context: No student association can be sustainably successful without the necessary staff to support its officers. HISA has 21 paid officers and is currently unable to support them to the level they require. If HISA has any chance of becoming a long-term success this must be addressed.

Ambitions

1. HISA will have a dedicated local staff member at every academic partner
2. HISA's staff team will be resourced to enable sector-leading support for its officers
3. HISA will create employment opportunities for students who will gain valuable experience and skills
4. All staff and officers will receive Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities and positively develop their careers with HISA

In 2020/21 HISA will:

- A. Introduce a staff satisfaction survey
- B. Pilot a staff appraisal system
- C. Evolve the staff training and induction program

- D. Create and introduce a formal CPD approval system for staff
- E. Review and evolve the induction and CPD process for Student Officers
- F. Review all HR Policies and procedures

In 2021-2023 HISA will:

- I. Create and introduce a formal staff appraisal system
- II. Implement recommendations from Human Resources (HR) Review
- III. Review staff and officer pay grades
- IV. Run an annual "friends of HISA" fundraising event
- V. Ensure there is "creative space" where students, officers and staff can bring new ideas to HISA and UHI

9: Finances and Resources/Facilities

Introduction: The above can only be achieved with appropriate and sufficient funding and space. For HISA to properly plan for the future, long-term financial plans need to be in place and agreed by the Partnership.

If HISA is to be properly recognised as providing real representation it must have some form of physical presence in each of the academic partners as well as a regional HQ.

Context: Last year HISA's regional team moved to a new office space in Inverness city centre. This was a fantastic move but there are still partners who have been unable to provide local HISA officers and staff with office space. This must be addressed.

The overarching financial challenges in the sector and UHI's financial crises means that HISA cannot rely on block grant increases in the future to fulfil all its ambitions. Alternative income streams must be explored as a priority.

Ambitions

1. HISA will have dedicated office space at every academic Partner in UHI
2. HISA will have a visible presence in every learning centre
3. HISA will have dedicated headquarters with space for expansion and growth
4. HISA will secure sustainable funding agreements and processes with the UHI Partnership to the effective delivery of all the above activities
5. HISA will have diverse income streams
6. Ensure local staff support at all UHI Partners

In 2020/21 HISA will:

- A. Outsource Financial functions
- B. Apply for external funding opportunities
- C. Review current HISA office space across Partnership
- D. Review HISA IT and administration systems
- E. Migrate HISA workspace to cloud computing

In 2021-2023 HISA will:

- I. Recruit commercial and specialist staff to maximise income
- II. Have an office in all HISA Partners
- III. Support UHI/Inverness College proposal for new Student building
- IV. Uniform budgeting and finance systems for all HISA locals and clubs and societies
- V. Investigate HISA services that could be outsourced to other College/tertiary Student Associations

10: Effective Governance and Internal Systems

Introduction: HISA must be accountable for its actions to the membership but also to the Partnership, Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR), Companies House, HMRC, Pension Regulator and other statutory bodies. These responsibilities ultimately lie with the Trustee Board of the Association and this body should ensure that its actions are transparent to the membership.

HISA relies on UHI for IT, accounting and payroll support.

Context: HISA's rapid growth has meant HISA has outgrown many of its internal systems and functions. HISA must quickly evolve its HR, accounting systems, staff training, casework, and IT.

Ambitions

1. HISA will operate with outstanding student-led governance
2. The HISA Board will operate with experts on the education sector, the Highlands and Islands communities, governance, charity, strategy, and finance
3. HISA will be underpinned by high-quality management and strong financial and internal processes
4. HISA will implement a reflective review process for the Trustee Board

In 2020/21 HISA will:

- A. Review Trustee induction and training
- B. Recruit a full Trustee Board
- C. Create a financial sub-committee

- D. Complete an annual calendar of HISA engagement and events
- E. Ensure all UHI Audit recommendations are completed

In 2021-2023 HISA will:

- I. Create further board sub-committees e.g. Communications, Finance Audit & Risk, Membership Services etc
- II. Create and introduce a formal Board effectiveness survey