Committee	Board of Management
Number on Agenda	22
Date paper prepared	21/06/2023	**Date of committee meeting**	28/06/2023
Subject	UHI Shetland Board of Management Report for 2023 HISA Elections at UHI Shetland
Author	Elliot Stradling
Action requested	To Note
Purpose of the paper	This paper helps to analyse the success of this year's election cycle, in an attempt to better understand what went well, what didn't go well, and how we might improve for next year's elections.
Brief summary of the paper	This paper contains an overview of the 2023 HISA election: addressing the process, staff involved and any complications that arose, as well as data on voters, votes, turnout and student numbers.
Consultation	HISA Finance, HISA Communications & HISA Local Staff members.
Resource implications	No resources or expenditure is required as a result of this paper.
Risk implications	There are no risks associated with this paper as no further actions are required.

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Link with strategy	This paper is intended to analyse the success of this year's election cycle, in an attempt to better understand what went well, what didn't go well, and how we might improve for next year's elections.
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	An Equality Impact Assessment Form was created for this election and sent to the UHI Governance and Policy Manager.
Island Community Impact	N/A
Paper status	☒ **Open** – The paper may be circulated to non-members of the committee and published online without restriction. ☐ **Restricted** – The paper must not be circulated to non-members or published online until after the committee meeting. ☐ **Confidential** - The paper must not be circulated beyond the committee members and should not be published online.
Freedom of information	Open

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2023 HISA Elections – UHI Shetland Board of Management Report

Executive Summary

HISA conducted elections for 19 roles across the UHI region, four of which could be voted on by UHI Shetland students: HISA Regional President, HISA Regional Vice-President Communities, HISA Regional Vice-President Education and UHI Shetland Depute President. These elections were conducted both online and in person, with some candidate recruitment, campaigning and voting, taking place virtually. Two of these four roles were successfully recruited for, with both the Regional Vice-President roles receiving no candidates.

The election performance at UHI Shetland saw a 1.66% turnout across all modes of study, while turnout across UHI was 2.9%. UHI Shetland had the ninth highest turnout of any Academic Partner during the 2023 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 free, fair and democratic election. HISA's Articles of Associations states HISA must hold elections for three Regional Officers (President, Vice-President Communities, and Vice-President Education) and at least one representative from each academic partner.

The 2023 elections were held between 6th February 2023 and 24th March 2023. In order to best reach all of the candidates for the election, HISA took measures to support the election process by conducting all of the candidate training and support, online. As in the last few elections, HISA utilised the turnout dashboard and the fast-track email function, in order to inform students and staff of important elections information, and provide students the opportunity to vote, as quickly as possible.

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 OneVoice 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	William Campbell	2
HISA Vice-President Communities	N/A	0
HISA Vice-President Education	N/A	0
UHI Shetland Depute President	Sinead Lucock	1

*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 2023 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, Natalie Bates served as HISA's 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. Both members of the Student Voice and Advocacy team, along with the Communications Manager, Student Advisor & relevant local staff, 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 UHI staff, assisting in the recruitment of candidates, delivering local training to candidates and supporting the voting process. The announcement of results was done via a YouTube video that was pre-recorded with all possible outcomes. After the results had been calculated, the video with the correct results was scheduled to go live at 6pm and a link was provided to all staff and students.

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The Elections Process

Dates

Nominations Open	6th February 2023 (10:00)
Nominations Close	3rd March 2023 (14:00)
Announcement of Candidates	3rd March 2023 (16:00)
Rules, Ethics and Campaigning Candidate Training	6th March 2023 (12:00)
	7th March 2023 (18:00)
	8th March 2023 (10:00)
Video Training	(Provided to candidates via email)
Regional/Local Awareness Training	(Various sessions throughout March)
Voting Opens	21st March 2023 (10:00)
Voting Closes	24th March 2023 (13:00)
Results Announced	24th March 2023 (18:00)

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, poster and manifesto) were provided through this form. Prior to and during nominations, drop-in sessions were run for any students that were thinking of standing, but who 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 each period.

Position	Nominations Received	Number of Candidates at voting week
HISA President	2	2
HISA Vice-President Communities	0	0
HISA Vice-President Education	0	0
UHI Shetland Depute President	1	1

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Preparing the Candidates

Candidates received training materials electronically, with training sessions conducted entirely on Microsoft Teams. All Candidates were invited to three live training sessions: The Rules, Ethics and Campaigning Training, which was mandatory for all candidates and was attended by all 20 candidates across three days, with an additional day added to catch the few students who missed the three scheduled training days. Regional Demographics Training, which was not mandatory, was only available to regional candidates and was attended by 1 candidate, 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 and engage with students, while the Regional Demographics Training was designed to inform regional candidates of the various demographics at UHI; where they study and what previous voting patterns looked like. The Local Awareness Training was based around providing local candidates with an enhanced picture of the nature of their academic partner, who they would likely be working with and what is expected of an Officer at their academic partner.

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.

Candidates were offered the opportunity to take part in a live hustings event, where they answered the following pre-prepared questions:

- If you could only achieve one manifesto promise this year, which would you choose?
- What, in your opinion, is the best way to increase student engagement with HISA (either regionally or at your local AP)?
- Why do you believe you are the best person to achieve the goals set out in your manifesto?
- What was your reason behind running for your chosen position?
- If your elections campaign had a theme song, what would it be?

There were two different hustings events scheduled for students to attend; one for the regional candidates, and another for the local candidates. This was intended to give the candidates an opportunity to promote themselves and their campaign to students, in a slightly less formal and more engaging way. As well as this, it was a good opportunity for candidates to answer questions from the students in attendance.

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These hustings events were recorded with candidates' permission and once the event had ended, the candidates' answers were then edited down and posted on the HISA website. If candidates were unable to attend the hustings event for the role they had chosen, they were offered the opportunity to pre-record their answers to each of the questions. These would then be added to the HISA website, alongside the other candidates.

Unlike in previous years, HISA did not organise class visits for candidates. Instead, candidates were informed that if they wished to conduct class visits, they must inform the elections coordinator, who would then check that the lecturer was happy for the other candidates in this election, to also speak to their class. They would then inform the other candidates, in case they also wanted to conduct a visit to this class. This was intended to ensure that all candidates were given the same opportunity to speak to classes, even if they didn't choose to do so.

Voting

Once voting went live, students were emailed a direct fast-track voting link to their UHI student emails, which gave them a one-click route to their ballot paper, by-passing the login process. Voting was advertised clearly on multiple areas of the HISA website. On the homepage, a large banner featuring the Student Elections design linked students directly to their emails, where they could find their fast-track voting email. Emails were also utilised locally to engage staff and Senior Management Team support in encouraging voters.

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. The physical polling stations were run by local HISA staff, who would engage with students on campus, encouraging them to vote. HISA also managed class visits with 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 election process, receiving 422 responses. When asked how they found out about the elections, 320 surveyed students cited emails, while 71 cited that MyDay was the main way in which the election caught their attention. In terms of candidate awareness, 244 surveyed students said that manifestos were the main way in which candidates caught their attention. Students gave an average score of 4.20 out of 5 when asked to rate the voting process and 60% of students said they were somewhat likely or very likely to engage with HISA in the future.

Marketing

The messaging of the 2023 Student Elections Campaign revolved around encouraging and unintimidating language that was intended to motivate students to take a proactive stance in improving the student experience, in the hopes that this would help with the lack of elections engagement HISA has seen in recent years. Alongside the core and key word

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designs, HISA staff were provided with email signature graphics 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, a variety 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

No complaints were received regarding the UHI Shetland Depute President position or any of the Regional Officer positions.

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Results

Table one details the result of the HISA Regional President election. William Campbell was elected for his first term in this role.

Table 1: HISA Regional President Election Result

Candidate	Votes	Elected?
William Campbell	706	Yes
Matthew Freeman	227	No
Reopen Nominations	39	No
Spoilt	1	N/A
Non-Transferable	0	N/A
Differential Loss	0	N/A
Total	**972**	**N/A**

Table two details the result of the UHI Shetland Depute President election. Sinead Lucock was elected for their second term in this role.

Table 2: UHI Shetland Depute President Election Result

Candidate	Votes	Elected?
Sinead Lucock	25	Yes
Reopen Nominations	3	No
Spoilt	0	N/A
Non-Transferable	0	N/A
Differential Loss	0	N/A
Total	**28**	**N/A**

Historic Election Overview

Table three details the past performance of UHI Shetland during HISA elections. HISA has seen a noticeable decline in student interest and overall engagement with regards to the elections, post-Covid. Although most Academic Partners at UHI saw an increase in voters and turnout during the 2023 election, UHI Shetland saw a small decrease in both areas. Although not as drastic as the drop between the 2021 and 2022 elections, the turnout and voter share at UHI Shetland was lower than it has been in the last four elections. This could be contributed to the lack of viable candidates, with the UHI Shetland Depute President candidate running unopposed and both of the Regional Vice-President positions receiving no nominees at all.

Table four details the number of unused votes there were for each of the HISA Regional roles and the Depute President role. From this data we can see that there were fewer unused votes for HISA Regional President, than in the past four elections. This can likely be attributed to the fact that both candidates for the role of HISA Regional President had a large on-campus presence at a number of Academic Partners, and were seen engaging with students regularly

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throughout voting week. From this data we can also deduce that the HISA Regional role was an important election for UHI students. This can be seen by the lack of Depute President votes, where there was a considerable rise in unused votes when compared to the last three elections. This can also likely be attributed to the lack of available candidates and the lack of candidate materials provided by the candidates up for election.

Table five highlights candidate numbers. 2023 saw the same number of candidates for the UHI Shetland Depute President position, when compared to the 2022 and 2021 elections, but less than in the 2020 election. HISA has seen a steady decline in nominees across multiple roles, over the last few elections. Although student engagement in terms of the elections, appears to have improved slightly since the Covid-19 pandemic, HISA will continue to encourage and support students at UHI Shetland who may be interested in running for an Officer position, in the hopes that this will boost candidate numbers for the 2024 election.

Table six highlights election engagement for the UHI Shetland Depute President role. This table shows that the 2023 election had both a lower turnout, and a lower number of votes for the depute president position, when compared to the 2022 election. This decrease in votes could be attributed to the lack of available candidates, or to a wider lack of interest in the HISA student elections.

Local Reflection

One of the issues noted by students trying to vote at UHI Shetland, was that the QR code and vote url did not work. Despite being on printed materials and tested before voting week began, once voting had opened, the link to vote automatically linked students to their emails, instead of the voting page. Although the cause of this is unknown, HISA suspects that it is related to our use of Union Cloud's digital interface. Due to issues we have previously had with attaining analytic data and election results while using Union Cloud's services, HISA will be moving over to MSL later on in the year. We are hopeful that this will help to curb some of the technical issues we have been experiencing in previous elections. Other than this, students expressed minimal technical or process-related issues, regarding voting in the 2023 Spring Election.

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. Unfortunately, no class visits took place at UHI Shetland in the 2023 Student Elections.

During voting week, UHI Shetland had one local HISA staff member on campus for the duration. Over the course of voting week, this staff member assisted in running the polling station, encouraging students on campus to vote. This staff member noted that students seemed to show a similar level of interested in the election, to that of the 2022 election cycle. However, they were disheartened by the lack of voting options, as well as the lack of candidates' materials provided to help them make an informed voting choice.

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On the last day of voting, HISA announced that they would be offering an incentive to all students who voted in this election. All students who had voted (before and after the announcement) would be entered into a prize draw where they would have the opportunity to win £250. This prize was to be drawn after voting had concluded and the winner would be announced on the HISA Website and social media channels. The winner was then contacted so that they could be delivered their prize. This incentive proved to be a very successful means of encouraging votes. After the incentive was announced, HISA saw an increase of more than 50% across all campuses, when compared to the previous three days of voting.

Staff have observed in previous UHI Shetland elections, that when candidates campaign more actively on campus, they have a higher success rate with achieving votes, than when the staff themselves attempt to get students to vote. With this in mind, staff are keen to find a way to motivate or encourage candidates to campaign, without being seen as favouring a particular candidate (especially the ones who are already eager to campaign). This was discussed in the post-election feedback session. As a result, a "dos & don'ts" list has been created by the elections coordinator, with the hopes that this will serve as a reference to help staff who wish to encourage candidates, get a better picture of what is and isn't doable. This is a live document and will continue to be developed as we move towards the next election, in order to cover as wide a variety of situations as possible.

Although this year's election saw an increase in overall turnout, when compared to the 2022 election, UHI Shetland have observed a noticeable decline in voter turnout and votes, when compared to previous years. With this in mind, it can be seen that this year's overall voter turnout is closer to the highs of the 2021 election, than the lows of the 2022 election. Increasing engagement on all fronts has been a key focus for the last few elections and will continue to be an important factor in the 2024 elections. HISA are confident that this increase in overall turnout is evidence that student engagement is improving, in relation to the elections. HISA have recently been looking at reviewing and re-writing the schedules and rules for the elections, in order to re-structure and re-design the elections around student engagement. It is our hope that through this re-vamp, we will find further solutions to the continued lack of engagement HISA has seen in the last few elections. As well as this, Academic Partners with continuously low voter turnout will be the main focus of this re-design, to ensure that no voter base is left unrepresented.

In previous elections, HISA staff contacted candidates directly via phone calls, to inform them they had been either unsuccessful, where staff would then follow-up regarding the support structures that are in place for students. Or to inform them that they were successful, where staff would then ask them if they will accept the role. For this election, HISA provided candidates with support info via email and the results were announced via a scheduled YouTube video. There were a few reasons for this: The first was to try and create a greater sense of community, where students, staff and candidates could all find out the results together and use the YouTube chat function to share their thoughts and opinions. As well as this, it was intended to streamline the results announcement process, where in previous elections the announcement has been delayed due to staff struggling to get in contact with candidates. This way, once HISA had all the relevant forms handed in by candidates on the last day of voting, we were able to make one big announcement, instead of a bunch of smaller

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ones. This method proved to be popular with staff, students and candidates and HISA will likely utilise it for future elections.

Moving forward HISA aims to strengthen our already good working relationships with UHI Shetland staff, continue to use targeted, consistent and encouraging 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 via class visits (where applicable), as well as develop and test new methods of engagement, in order to best promote the elections to students. Creating more awareness (both on and off campus) well in advance of nominations opening, boosting HISA's social media reach, streamlining the entire elections process and helping to strengthen engagement with students through various different means, will be our main focus in the run-up to the 2024 election.

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Appendices

Table 3: Overall Past Election Performance

UHI Shetland*	2020	2021	2022	2023
Voters	110	72	49	**30**
Turnout	6.24%	5.17%	2.68%	**1.66%**
Voter Share	4.40%	4.31%	6.49%	**2.96%**
Student Numbers	1778	1392	1828	**1807**
UHI Shetland Students as a Percentage of UHI	5.85%	4.98%	5.77%	**5.18%**

*In 2022 the Shetland College and NAFC Marine Centre campuses were merged. Where these campuses would usually have their data separated, to avoid confusion the historic data for these campuses have been merged in the above table

Table 4: Unused Votes by Students

Unused Votes	2020	2021	2022	2023
Did not vote for President	509	370	139	**40**
	20.18%	*22.13%*	*18.41%*	***3.95%***
Did not vote for Vice-President Communities	622	370	155	**N/A**
	24.66%	*22.13%*	*20.53%*	***N/A***
Did not vote for Vice-President Education	639	350	118	**N/A**
	25.34%	*20.93%*	*15.63%*	***N/A***
Did not vote for Depute President	18	32	15	***70***
	0.71%	*1.91%*	*1.99%*	***3.87%***

Table 5: Candidate Numbers

Role	2020	2021	2022	2023
HISA President	4	3	2	**2**
HISA Vice-President Communities	1	2	1	**0**
HISA Vice-President Education	4	2	1	**0**
UHI Shetland Depute President	4	1	1	**1**

Table 6: UHI Shetland Students Votes for UHI Shetland Depute-President

Votes for UHI Shetland Depute President	2020	2021	2022	2023
Votes	108	72	48	**28**
Turnout	6.07%	5.17%	2.62%	**1.55%**

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