



Highlands and Islands Students' Association

End of Year Report 2023/24

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Date: June 2024

Depute President Elect's Foreword

This year has been a challenging year as I only started to work as the student intern in January 2024 and has included the proposed college cuts including a proposal campus closure. However, I look forward to stepping into my new role as Depute President on the 1st of August 2024 and thank the students who voted for me during the Spring Elections.

Despite the proposed college cuts I have been able to host a few events in semester 2 for students including bringing a local business called The Annex into campus to sell Shetland Pride Merchandise to coincide with LGBTQ History month and offer a student discount, hosted the annual Orkney Vs Shetland quiz where we invited all students and staff to participate and finally, we hid trolls around Lerwick, Scalloway and Mareel where if a student finds a troll they hand it back to the Student Association office in exchange for a gift voucher to one of the local businesses which offer student discounts.

Since coming into the Student Intern post, I have been able to join committee meetings and attend regular meetings with UHI Shetland staff to discuss a variety of issues and concerns students have and supporting the students as much as possible during a concerning time for all students who look to carry on with their studies in the coming years.

I very much look forward to the 24/25 academic year and to continue to improve the student experience and attend committee and board meetings to represent the students' voice.

Harley Green

Operational Staffing Updates

Senior Leadership Team

Interim Chief Executive Officer, Antony Blackshaw and Interim Student Voice Manager, Colina Wright both left the Students' Association as planned in Autumn 2023. Their replacements, Rachel Burn, CEO and Simon Varwell, Director of Student Engagement and Representation commenced their roles following a short handover period. Rachel and Simon have attended UHI Shetland Board and made their introductions and are committed to working in partnership across all Academic Partners.



Student Intern

In the absence of a student elected officer, a student Intern was recruited to ensure the student voice is adequately represented. Harley Greene commenced in post in January and immediately started to make an impact with planning events, attending committees, and engaging with students. Harley will remain in post until 31st July 2024 to allow for continuity with the local officer role commencing 1st August 2024.

Local Coordinator

Local Coordinator, Francesca Meneghetti began supporting Harley in April in his day-to-day activities and engaging locally with student support services. Francesca is based in Orkney, increasing her hours to full time to provide cover for UHI Shetland and UHI Orkney. Staff in Orkney and Shetland have worked well together in the past while covering vacancies and given the recruitment issues at both locations it was felt this was the best way to provide support to Shetland at this time. Francesca provides support remotely while the Development Manager is present for any in person activities and meetings as required.

Insight and Democracy Coordinator

Following the resignation of postholder Elliot Stradling, the Student Engagement and Representation Coordinator been rewritten as Insight and Democracy Coordinator. Paul Stalker was successful at interview and starts in his new role on 1st July. Paul joins us from a similar role GCUSA where he has developed considerable expertise in the field of student representation support, learning and teaching policy at institutional and national level, rep training, student-led teaching awards and more.

Student Representation

Student Partnership Agreement

The Highlands and Islands Students' Association and the University of the Highlands and Islands signed a new Student Partnership Agreement on 1st December 2023.

The agreement covers a three-year period from 2024 to 2026 and stipulates the three themes that both the Students' Association and the University will work in partnership with to enhance the student experience. These three themes are: Improved academic growth, engagement and quality; Active campaigning and community engagement; celebrating success.

William Cambell, President remarked on the commitment towards collaboration and how the Partnership agreement will strengthen further the partnership working already undertaken by the Students' Association and the UHI.

All Shetland Student Meetings

Following reports in the media that suggested UHI Shetland would be restructuring with a significant loss to both staff and courses offered to students, the Students' Association set up two All Student meetings to enable our members to come together and share their views and agree on potential actions. One meeting was in person only, with approximately 25 students present in addition to Gary Souter - VP Ed, Jane Lewis – Principal and CEO UHI Shetland, and Andrew Anderson – EIS/FELA Branch Secretary. The second meeting was hybrid, with approximately 20 students in person and 8 online, in addition to William Campbell – President, Jane Lewis and Andrew Anderson. Students at these meetings discussed their feelings and views and decided unanimously to protest the proposals in solidarity with staff, circulate a petition created by EIS/FELA to all students by email and circulate a template letter to MSPs for students to personalise and send to their Scottish Government representatives. The petition and MSP template were also uploaded to the Students' Association website. The December meeting of Student Voice Representative Council decided on the date and time for the protest to allow for the maximum impact.

Student Protest

Following the Shetland All Student Meetings, students self-organised and with the support of the Students' Association a protest was planned to coincide with UHI Shetland Board of Management AGM. This delay also allowed time for Shetland's postponed graduation ceremony to proceed unhindered and to not overshadow the

achievements of our graduates. The HISA office was made available to students in the weeks before the protest, with cardboard, paint and brushes provided. Any student could come and use the office to make signs and banners. Construction students made some wooden placards, and the Art students put an enormous amount of effort into creating impactful and creative signs to ensure their views and voices were heard. Online students were encouraged to upload their own placards and reinforce the campaign through the use of social media. Emails were sent by the Students' Association to all Highlands and Islands MSPs alerting them to the action, and letters of support were received from Edward Mountain, Jamie Halcro Johnston and Ariane Burgess.

The protest itself was attended by approximately 60 students, and staff were also free to attend as it was held during the lunch hour. Students were forthcoming with their gratitude as they felt the action made as much impact as was possible and the student voice was heard both on campus and across the community as a result of the media coverage provided by Shetland News, the Shetland Times and BBC Radio Shetland.

President, William Campbell visited Shetland to support students in their protest, aiming their action towards the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council. His article on this action can be found [here](#).

Board Accountability Session

At the same meeting that students made the decision to protest the proposed cuts, students requested that members of the Board make themselves available to answer questions and allow students to meet the people making the decisions that will affect their future learning. The meeting was well attended by students both online and in person, with William Campbell joining to support UHI Shetland Students. The meeting was minuted and these were circulated to both Board and students. Feedback has been positive; this discourse was appreciated by students, and they asked that the lines of communication remain open.

All Student Meetings – UHI wide



An all-Student Meetings was held in February 2024 as a hybrid, UHI wide event. Online attendance was facilitated by Teams while in-person attendance was possible on campus, where light refreshments were provided. The meeting was called to ensure the necessary business of the Students' Association including an update to our governing Articles and proposed changes to the officer structure were presented to the student body and agreed. Following student feedback, these meetings were repeated in March, April and May focussing on specific themes pertinent to the current student experience while addressing issues that were known to be causing anxiety and uncertainty. ASOS, cuts at various UHI Academic Partners, shaping the future of learning at UHI, the student community, elections and officer accountability were some of what students came together to debate as a collective.

Elections

Nominations in the Spring Elections opened on 29th January for local and cross-campus officer positions. Following a structural review of the officer posts, President William Campbell communicated to UHI Shetland that a decision had been taken to change the officer posts on offer in Shetland. The previous officer structure up to 2018 comprised of Depute President 7 hours, Lerwick Local Officer 3 hours, Scalloway Local Officer 3 hours, giving a total of 13 officer hours available locally. During the transition process of the merger, the Depute President was temporarily increased to 8 hours per week. In 2022 the Depute President Ian McCormick requested the Lerwick Local Officer post was removed and absorbed into the Depute role. As recruitment for the Scalloway role has failed for two consecutive years and given the proposed reduction in UHI Shetland campuses, the officer posts have been condensed into one officer position and which now Depute President Shetland at 12 hours per week.

Harley Green was duly elected and will commence in his officer post on 1st August 2024.

A full elections report has been provided by Simon Varwell.

Education Scotland Thematic Review and Annual Engagement Visit

Local staff participated in the Thematic Review for Education Scotland on the additional needs of learners. In addition to the questionnaires and interviews with Education Scotland, the Students' Association participated further with this exercise by engaging groups of students to comment on their experiences in a non-intrusive and anonymous manner. Through class visits, different student groups were offered the opportunity to give feedback on the support they have been offered in relation to their additional needs.

The Annual Engagement visit was attended by local Students' Association staff and a form was completed in advance following consultation with students and Student Voice Representatives.

Student Voice Representatives

Student Voice Representative levels have remained static in comparison to last year. Representatives have been recruited from a good range of subjects and across the curriculum, with reps on networked degree courses, Post Graduate (Taught) and other HE and FE courses. The most engaged Reps have been on Art based courses, and meetings have been held monthly with the same core 4 or 5 students attending each time. See Fig 1 below.

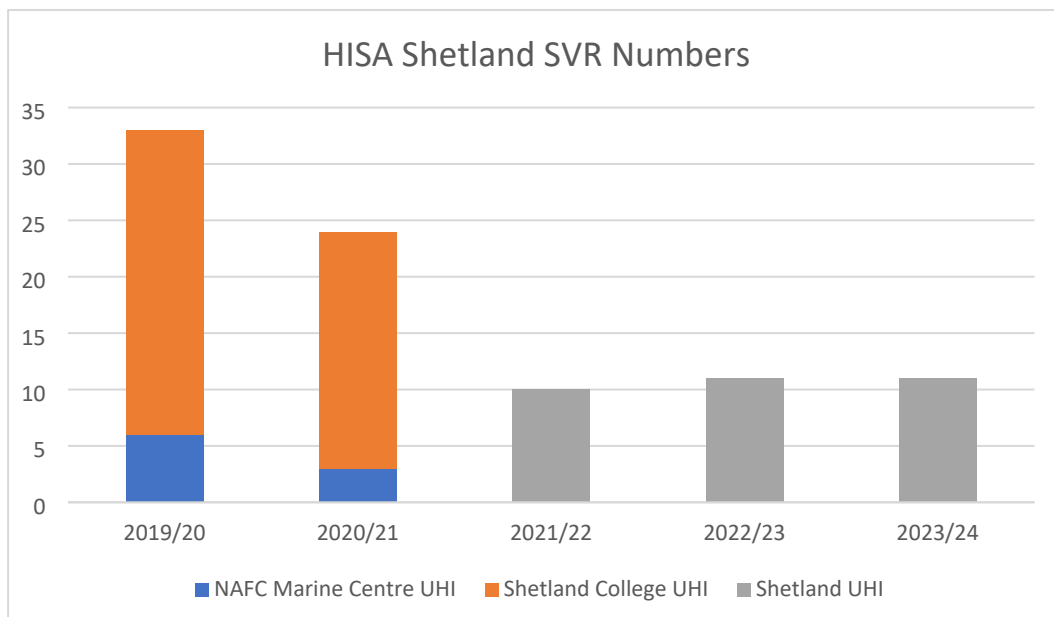


Fig. 1 HISA Shetland SVR Figures

Student Engagement Activities and Events

Freshers Week 2023 was held from Monday 18th to Friday 22nd September 2023. The Highlands and Islands Students' Association put on a calendar of events for students to participate in. Events available were in person and online, enabling students to benefit from shared experiences irrespective of their mode of study.

Student Social Night at Mareel

The upstairs section of the Café bar at Mareel was booked for the sole use of students on the Wednesday evening from 5pm to 9pm. Free drink vouchers were issued to students on arrival and free snacks were provided. The students who attended early in the evening sat and chatted over hot chocolate. There was good interaction with staff and they sent us some photos of them enjoying themselves. Students arrived in groups over the space of the evening, with one group visiting after their night class had finished. There was a great atmosphere, with students congregating in groups around the sofas or bringing groups of chairs together. All appreciated the free drinks provided.

Yoga

Three yoga sessions were provided for students. One was held in person at The Mission, this was well attended with only 2 spaces remaining. The other 2 sessions were held online and were available to students across the partnership, with 19 tickets sold for the events (tickets were free). Positive feedback was received from students who attended both in person and online.

Treasure Hunt

A simple treasure hunt was created at Scalloway and Lerwick campus where numbers were placed at useful spots across campus such as gender-neutral toilets, printers, student support services and student areas. Students were provided an entry form via email and printed versions were made available, so students were not charged by proxy for entry due to the cost of printing on campus. Students could either email their entry or hand a paper version into the library where the staff then gave the students a voucher for use at either Briggistanes or Da Haaf. £140 worth of breakfast rolls were given to students as a prizes.

Cinema Ticket Giveaway

Students were offered free cinema tickets for sending in a photo that summed up their student experience so far. There were no conditions or rules, every entry received a cinema ticket and those who had caring responsibilities received extra tickets. A total of 39 tickets were given away. This received excellent feedback from those who participated, with one student commenting that they would not have chosen to have any involvement with the Students' Association if it were not for this initiative.

Halls Takeaway Night

Goody bags containing Student Association freebies – water bottles, USB cables and headphones, notebook and pen, reusable coffee cups and fidget toys were given to all halls residents along with a flier explaining their Students' Association would provide them a free takeaway of their choice on a night of their choice. Once they had agreed on a night that suited them all, the order would be placed and delivered for them free of charge. However, the residents did not respond.

16 Days of Activism

To help tackle gender-based violence and gender inequality, HISA encouraged students to take the White Ribbon pledge with an online and social media campaign and ensuring white ribbons were available at each location across the partnership.

Student Safe Space

Feedback from students over previous years has always centred on the lack of student only spaces and specifically, a quiet room where students can go to decompress and take a quiet moment. Following the impact of Covid, it was felt this need was more prevalent than ever and many students require an area such as this for their wellbeing on campus. Officers have campaigned for this in previous years but were always informed there were no available spaces, but that the campus redevelopment programme would address this. Following the input of key UHI Shetland student support staff, a room was identified for use by students as a quiet room. The Students' Association offered to put forward a quarter of their local Shetland budget to provide furnishings. A sofa, two bean bag chairs, a standing

lamp, three side tables, a weighted blanket and two yoga mats have subsequently been provided for student use. It was decided that the money spent on this would be of more benefit and greater value to a higher quantity of students than putting on a Refreshers event around Up Helly Aa time that may be poorly attended.

Student Night at Mareel

UHI Shetland students studying at Mareel deliver a community event twice a year where they showcase their talents at a Student Night concert. To provide these students with real world experience of performing in front of an audience, the Highlands and Islands Student's Association arranged and paid for transportation from Mareel to the Lerwick campus during October and March. These students then performed to an appreciative crowd over lunchtime in the Briggistanes cafeteria area. We are always delighted to help this student group as part of their learning experience and to integrate them into the wider UHI Shetland student community. The Students' Association also provided the visiting students with vouchers for lunch and refreshments.

Online Quiz

An online, UHI wide quiz was held to promote democracy and our Spring elections while allowing students to participate in an event irrespective of their place and mode of study.

International Women's Day

To celebrate International Women's Day, an online Quiz hosted by North, West and Hebrides officers was open to all UHI students. The quiz focussed heavily on facts about women's achievements throughout history and was supported by the participation of Iain Morrison, Dean of Students.

In addition, the profiles of some of the women in our organisation and their educational and professional journeys were showcased on social media to inspire our female students.

LGBTQ+ History Month

As part of our LGBTQ+ History month celebrations, in addition to a social media and campus poster campaign which shone the spotlight on some prominent Scottish campaigners of LGBTQ+ rights, the Annexe Shetland visited Lerwick campus with some of their Pride merchandise to sell to students. The Annexe offered a student discount, giving a 20% reduction in price to students which was then matched by the Students' Association as a donation to the Pride Fund. LGBTQ+ rainbow flag pins were purchased and offered to students free of charge, and these were also available for staff to purchase. The proceeds of this are being donated to the Shetland Pride Fund. The newly created Student Pride Networked was advertised widely during this month of celebrating the diversity of our students. No matter where a student is based, they can connect with others on this network to share their experiences in a safe and welcoming environment.

Trolls Event

To promote local businesses offering student discounts, Harley adapted a popular cruise ship game involving rubber ducks. Asking students if they were "Awaar o' ony trows daday?" offered some local contextualisation to this game of hide and seek. A variety of brightly coloured individuals were allowed to roam the halls of Scalloway and Lerwick Campuses with some finding their way to Mareel. All students had to do was catch them and hand them in to their lecturer, HISA office or to the library. Our thanks go out again to the library staff for facilitating student participation. As a result of finding the peerie trows, gift vouchers worth £25 each were issued to students to spend at Harrys, the Shetland Times Bookshop, Venture Chiropractic and Westside Pine. This event has brought some fun to the end of the academic year, given students a treat of their choice while alerting them to available student discounts, while offering a clear demonstration of HISA's commitment to supporting local businesses.

Positivity Wall

To celebrate Mental Health Awareness Week, the Students Association collaborated with UHI Shetland Student Support Staff to envision and create a positivity wall here students could leave messages to uplift each other and offer supportive messages.

Online Campaigns



A diverse calendar of events was promoted on social media and via articles and blogs on our website. These included Lesbian Day of Visibility, Saltire Awards, World Autism Day, Time to Talk Day and Holocaust Memorial Day.

The Students' Association's independent Advice Service has created a series of articles relevant to student groups on Disabled Students Allowance, tips and resources for studying and how to combat stress.

Question of the Month

To gather important feedback and help us shape our approach to particular areas of our business, we have been asking students one question every month. These are posited to our Student Voice Reps at SVR council meetings, promoted in our newsletters and posted on our website and social media. The questions so far have been focussed on ASOS, student community and the accountability of elected student officers.

Newsletter

Students across the partnership have access to a student newsletter from either their Academic Partner or a collaboration between the Academic Partner and the Students' Association. In an attempt to offer parity of experience to all UHI students, HISA created our own monthly newsletter, addressing the confusion from some students who were unsure if their newsletter was from their Students' Association or their education provider. Every issue contains important information relevant to all UHI students, a message from their President, puzzles, easy and cheap recipes and a dedicated section for local events and updates. These have been well received to date, with the April stats showing an 89% open rate for UHI Shetland students.

The first three editions can be found here:

[Newsletter Issue1 Feb24.pdf \(738.78 KB\)](#) [Newsletter Issue2 Mar24.pdf \(831.74 KB\)](#)

[Newsletter Issue3 Apr24.pdf \(662.7 KB\)](#)

Welcome Email



This year, for the first time, students who have received an offer will receive a Welcome Email from the Students' Association. This is to introduce ourselves to students before they set foot on campus and let them know that there is a student community ready and waiting for them to join. The first emails were in mid-June and already we have had correspondence from new students about joining clubs and societies.

HISA Awards

670 nominations were received across the Partnership. Shortlisting will commence in the coming weeks.