



2024 HISA Elections – Report to University Court and Academic Partner governing bodies

Executive Summary

In the spring of 2024, HISA conducted elections for 16 student officer roles across the UHI region. All students were able to vote for the two regional posts and then one or two depute roles depending on the Academic Partner. These elections were conducted both online and in person, with some candidate recruitment, campaigning and voting, taking place virtually. Four vacancies remain, a much lower vacancy rate than in 2023, for which a co-option process will be developed.

The election performance was similar to 2023 in that the turnout of UHI students was 3%. Whilst the number of UHI Student voters has gone down, the turnout has remained the same because of a drop in the number of enrolled students at this time of the year.

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 two Regional Officers (President and Vice-President Education) and at least one representative from each academic partner.

Our Spring Elections took place in March 2024, and a By-Election in May 2024 (for vacant positions).

HISA supported 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 MSL, 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.

This report aims to update governing bodies in UHI and the Academic Partners, contributing towards their responsibility under the 1994 Act to ensure free and fair elections in their students' association. Unlike past years, a single combined report is presented to the governing bodies for efficiency.

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.



Spring Election

Position	Elected	Candidates*
HISA President	William Campbell	1
HISA Vice-President Education	Shannon MacCallum	4
UHI Perth President	Xander McDade	4
UHI Perth Depute President	Andi Garrity	2
UHI Inverness President	Elizabeth Keegan	3
UHI Inverness Depute President	Holly Pearce	3
UHI Moray Depute President (1 of 2)	Sarah Marshall	1
UHI North, West and Hebrides Depute President (West)	Nicolas Kowalczuk	1
Scottish Association for Marine Science Depute President	Kian McDonald	1
UHI Shetland Depute President	Harley Green	1

May By-Election

Position	Elected	Candidates*
UHI Argyll Depute President	Siobhan Moore	1
UHI Moray Depute President (1 of 2)	R.O.N.	1
UHI Orkney Depute President	Mila Tabone	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 2024 Elections were overseen by the National Union of Students (NUS), who served as our Returning Officer (a service available through our affiliation to NUS). 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, Simon Varwell 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 until the end of March 2024 (when he left post) and for the By-Election this role was undertaken by Simon Varwell. The role of Elections Coordinator involved 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. Other members of the Student Engagement Representation team and the Communications team 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 Spring Election 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 14.00 and a link was provided to all staff and students.

The Elections Process

Spring Election Dates

Nominations Open	29 th January 2024 (10:00)
Nominations Close	29 th February 2024 (14:00)
Announcement of Candidates	1 st March 2024 (10.00)
Campaigning period begins	4 th March 2024 (10.00)
Voting Opens	11 th March 2024 (10:00)
Voting Closes	14 th March 2024 (12.30)
Results Announced	14 th March 2024 (14.00)

By-Election Dates

Nominations Open	15 th April 2024 (10:00)
Nominations Close	26 th April 2024 (14:00)
Announcement of Candidates	26 th April 2024 (16:00)
Campaigning period begins	29 th April 2024 (10:00)



Voting Opens	7 th May 2024 (10:00)
Voting Closes	9 th May 2024 (13:00)
Results Announced	9 th May 2024 (16:00)

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 student that was thinking of standing, but who were unsure of what it might entail or how they might go about nominating themselves.

Nominations received is as per page 2.

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 and via social media. 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.

Students could vote both online and at physical polling stations run by HISA staff.

Complaints

No complaints were received.

Points for development

The use of physical ballot stations in 2024 was a clear benefit in terms of raising the visibility of the elections and allowing staff to encourage students to vote.

We did find some difficulties with individuals struggling to log in to our website, underlining the importance of questions we are exploring with relevant teams in UHI about single sign-on capabilities including the HISA website and not just UHI facilities.

The remaining vacancies will be opened to a co-option process. This process is in development and consultation will take place with affected Academic Partner managements and governing bodies, with a view to co-option early in the new academic year:

- UHI Moray Depute President (1 of 2).
- Highland Theological College Depute President.
- UHI North, West and Hebrides Depute President (North).
- UHI North, West and Hebrides Depute President (Islands).

Finally, a number of questions relating to the elections – from technical to promotional – will feature within a likely democracy review HISA is planning. If approved, this would be led by our new Insight



and Democracy Coordinator (who will commence post at the start of July and take on the roles of elections coordinator and Deputy Returning Officer). This review would cover the effectiveness and connectivity of various functions such as elections, our All-Student Meeting and our Executive. Consultation with governing bodies and managements is likely to feature within such a review, ensuring that our democratic processes are effective, transparent and trusted by all stakeholders. It will add to other related processes such as HISA's ongoing consultation on its new strategy.

Simon Varwell

Director of Student Engagement and Representation and acting elections coordinator

Highlands and Islands Students' Association

Monday 3rd June 2024



Appendix: election turnout in 2024

Academic Partner	Total Students	Voters	Turn Out
UHI Argyll	1514	17	1.12%
Highland Theological College	129	14	10.80%
UHI Inverness	4914	152	3.09%
UHI Moray	3064	63	2.05%
UHI North, West and Hebrides	3995	103	2.57%
UHI Orkney	958	18	1.87%
UHI Perth	5508	104	1.90%
Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS)	170	18	10.58%
UHI Shetland	1026	57	5.55%
Sabhal Mòr Ostaig	276	8	2.89%
Executive Office	633	63	9.95%
Total (All UHI Students)	20433	617	3.02%