

Item: 5

College Management Council Sub-committee: 24 May 2021.

Highlands and Islands Students' Association – Update.

Report by Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing.

1. Purpose of Report

To appraise the Sub-committee of the work of the Highlands and Islands Students' Association.

2. Recommendations

The Sub-committee is invited to note:

2.1.

The paper prepared by the Orkney Depute President of the Highlands and Islands Students' Association, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, outlining some key activities during March and April 2021.

3. Highlands and Islands Students' Association

3.1.

Both the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council continue to encourage colleges to ensure that students engage as fully as possible in the life and governance of colleges. Effective engagement of students features strongly in the Code of Good Governance for Scotland's Colleges published by Colleges Scotland.

3.2.

In order to encourage and enable students to present their ideas to the College Management Council Sub-committee, a report is presented from the Highlands and Islands Student Association.

3.3.

The paper prepared by the Orkney Depute President of the Highlands and Islands Students' Association is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

4. Corporate Governance

This report relates to governance and procedural issues and therefore does not directly support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.

5. Financial Implications

There are no significant financial implications arising directly from the recommendations of this noting report.

6. Legal Aspects

There are no legal implications arising directly from this noting report.

7. Contact Officers

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8. Appendix

Appendix 1: Paper from Highlands and Islands Students Association.

HISA Orkney – CMC report

1. KEY ISSUES

The main issues students have been facing throughout the months of March and April were related to social isolation and the fear of a disruption to the learning experience due to the EIS-Fela strikes action. Underlying such challenges was a wider issue of discontinuous communication and engagement.

1.1. EIS-Fela strike action

The Further Education Lecturers' Association strike action that took place throughout March and April hindered the learning experience for many students across UHI. HISA had serious concern around the impact of such event on students, who had already faced great detriment in their learning experience throughout the pandemic. The matter was discussed within the executive committee, and strategies were appointed to support FE students across the partnership. Student feedback was gathered through online surveys. Fortunately, it appears the student body in Orkney did not suffer greatly from such disruptions in the teaching process.

1.2. Student Engagement

After an initial boost of engagement throughout the student elections period until the end of March, HISA Orkney faced significant challenges to maintain such rates of engagement. Communication with class reps was subjected to a lack of response, affecting the accessibility of direct student feedback in relation to the learning experience.

1.3. Sanitary Products Provisions

In March, HISA Orkney reached out to OC Expenditure and placed an order of sanitary products to be made available at the college over the second half of the semester so that student and staff needs would be adequately met. Sanitary products provisions were restocked at Kirkwall campus on March 31st and will be regularly checked by the HISA Depute. This was made possible by the collaboration and support offered by Orkney College staff, who guided the Depute throughout the entirety of the process.

2. KEY ACTIVITIES

The months of March and April brought with them a multitude of activities and renewed opportunities for the improvement of the student experience at OC and the wider UHI. HISA Orkney developed new relations with the local community in the hope of enhancing the inclusivity and accessibility of the student experience in Orkney.

2.1. Local Community

Over the last couple of months, HISA Orkney built a closer relationship with Orkney Youth Forum, attending regular meetings and developing collaboration opportunities aimed at a renewed cohesion between the student body and local community. The two are currently working on rebranding the group, promoting the upcoming SYP elections, and getting an understanding of young people's needs in Orkney. This information will be used for the creation of shared events in the future. HISA Orkney recently created an online survey promoted via student email and social media posts investigating student opinions in regard to discounts available on the islands. The information gathered will be kept anonymous and used to increase the range of discounts available to young people in Orkney through the Young Scot Card in partnership with OYF. This will improve open communication and collaboration with a multitude of local businesses in the hope of enhancing the inclusivity and wholeness of the student experience in Orkney. HISA Orkney is also currently exploring the possibility of new student discount opportunities with local businesses ranging from leisure to education. In such a process, HISA will work in partnership with the OC marketing and communication team.

2.2. Student Elections

Student Elections took place in February and March 2021, culminating in the voting period between March 15th – 19th 2021. Orkney College voting rates (7.55%) exceeded those of the last year, achieving the fourth placement across the entire partnership in terms of proportional turnout and being one vote away from breaking the Orkney turnout record. HISA Orkney SAC supported both candidates throughout the campaign period, promoting the elections, planning class visits, and organizing a live Meet the Candidates session on Facebook, which gave unprecedented visibility to the local student elections with a total audience of 1400 spectators. The appointed officer for 2021-2022 was Francesca Meneghetti.

2.3. Events

As mentioned in the last report, over the past months HISA Orkney has been working in close partnership with Shetland, Moray, and Lewis Castle' officers to create a series of quiz nights open to the entire partnership. The events took place on Friday 26th February, Friday 5th March, and Friday 26th March and were characterized by excellent turnout rates of an average of thirty students per night. HISA Orkney promoted the *Switching Gears Festival* between Monday 22nd March and Friday 26th March. The event was constituted by daily interactive sessions centred on the themes of sports inclusivity and accessibility, to share the benefits of cycling for everyone in HE and FE. Talks were offered by Gears for Queers, Scottish Disability Sport, and Young Women in Cycling. *Hisa Creates*, a four-week event promoting the infinite variety of creative expression was launched in April in collaboration with the HISA Art Club. HISA Orkney was involved in the promotion of the initiative as well as in the panel of judges. All the artworks were shared on social media, and five prizes were appointed. *Grow with HISA*, the regional indoor gardening project was launched on Wednesday 7th April and will be taking place until Friday 28th May. Finally, *Tales from Orkney*, a series of four online storytelling evenings will be hosted by HISA Orkney and storyteller Tom Muir throughout May. The event is currently being advertised on our social media channels with the support of the OC marketing team. HISA Orkney already received some enthusiastic feedback in regard to the initiative and decided to extend the event to all UHI students and staff.