# The Board of Management Project Report

# Executive Summary

This report outlines the HISA Board of Management Project, the findings from conversations had with each Academic Partner (AP) within UHI that has HISA representation, and recommendations arising from these findings.
The paper highlights the following topics:

- The resourcing for Boards of Management in terms of staff and student input
- The value of the student voice across the UHI Partnership
- The ways in which support has been offered to student board members but not always taken up
- The importance of these meetings as seen by HISA officers, despite initial intimidation
- How key relationships between AP's and HISA in the success of student board member contributions
- The need for training and support for student board members and new local staff within HISA
- The need for a standardised process for recruiting 2nd student board members (where applicable)

Based on these findings, this report recommends the establishment of a Board of Management Support Action Plan, to be negotiated and signed off by HISA and Boards, to ascertain responsibility on both the students' association and academic partners for supporting student board members and a clear timeline of completion. Recommendations are also suggested for HISA staff, HISA officers and Boards of Management:

## HISA Officers

- Proactively ask for support for board meetings from board representatives and HISA staff
- Fully utilise training opportunities
- Build good relationships with board representatives
- Attend and fully contribute to board meetings
- Regularly update board of HISA activity both locally and regionally, ideally through a written report

## HISA Staff

- Ensure officers are prepared for board meetings and understand their role
- Help support officer to develop skills relevant to board
- Staff to take part in relevant training
- Build a relationship with board representatives, specifically secretary
- Ensure have a strong knowledge of AP and HISA party lines
- Support officers to regularly update board on HISA activity both locally and regionally, ideally through a written report

## Board of Management representatives

- Invite incoming HISA officer/student member to shadow board meeting
- Set up an introductory meeting with board chair and secretary as part of officer induction
- Build a relationship with HISA staff based locally
- Ensure student member can attend meetings around study commitments
- Set up a regular meeting with HISA Officers prior to board meetings
- Make selves available to officers for support
- Prepare an induction for student board members either separately or as part of other board member inductions.
- Consider use of CDN resources.
- Set up an introductory meeting with board chair and secretary as part of officer induction

# Introduction

In November 2021, the Highlands and Islands Students' Association (HISA) began a project examining the experience of student representatives on Boards of Management within the academic partners (APs) that make up the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) where HISA have representation.

UHI is a multi-campus tertiary education provider operating across the Highlands and Islands, Perthshire and Morayshire. It is made up of 12 academic partners who have their own governance models that interlink with the overall governance of UHI, run by Executive Office (EO).

UHI is a post-1992 institution and has been designated as a university under the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 (the "1992 Act"). Within this legislation, the duties of Boards of Management are listed.

Many academic partners within UHI operate under the governance linked to the Education Act 1994 and either are a merged or non-incorporated college. Most are also members of the College Development Network (CDN) and follow guidance produced by the organisation, including Get into Governance training and the Code of Good Governance for Scotland's Colleges.

"Adherence to the Code which has been developed by the sector and its key stakeholders through the Good Governance Steering Group is obligatory for every board that receives money from the Scottish Funding Council."

Some academic partners are registered as 'Company Limited by Guarantee' who deliver education so must operate under the governance of the Companies Act and the rules within this.

UHI also has an academic partner that does not have a separate Board of Management making sole decisions on behalf of the AP but is a sub-committee of the local authority's Education, Leisure and Housing Committee and has members of the local council, members from the local committee as well as staff and students from the college. Decisions can be made by this committee to suggest approval on items but these need to be finalised and approved through the council's committee structure.

# Project Outline

With an overarching objective to ensure that each Board of Management has effective and supported student members, this project aims to resolve the following:

- Assessing resources/training from HISA in supporting officers and students on Boards
- Assessing resources/training within the sector for student board members
- Assessing how to support local HISA staff in Board of Management queries
- Ascertain relationships between local HISA teams and their respective boards
- Ascertain expectations of student board members across the partnership
- Ensuring equity across the partnership in terms of student support, training, expectations, obligations, and relationships related to board of management

In November 2021, HISA staff began a consultation to help inform this project further. With support from local governance practitioners and HISA officers and staff, perceptions, expectations, and potential actions have been gathered across the partnership to ensure Boards with HISA representation have effective student membership on its board.

Resources available to Boards of Management across UHI and HISA are extremely varied in terms of staff allocation to board administration, working hours of both HISA officers and staff as well as the number of HISA officers and staff at each AP alongside what committees HISA officers sit on. The full table can be seen in the appendix (Appendix 2) but from this overview we can see:

- Not all boards have more than one student member (regardless of governance model followed)
- Not all APs have the same resourcing for Boards in terms of staff and officer hours
- There is inconsistency around what other committee meetings student Board members sit on that feed into local boards.

What follows are general themes that came out of these conversations, which involved evaluating current practice across the partnership. Recommendations for Boards and HISA to take forward for improvement will follow to ensure both Boards and the students' association can take action to ensure student representatives and students themselves are at the heart of decision making.

# Method

HISA conducted semi-structured interviews with each local HISA officer who has a place on their local AP's Board, HISA staff based locally and representatives from local Boards, including secretaries, clerks, Chairs and AP Principals.

General notes were taken around set questions put to each type of consultee with space for additional comments. Discussions were led by a member of the project team not affiliated to that specific AP to allow for open and honest conversation so that a full picture could be gathered and suggestions that would benefit across the partnership would come forth. Notes were made available to those who took part in the consultation and not shared beyond the project team.

To protect the honesty of these conversations, general themes will be brought up and discussed to establish any patterns and to ensure anonymity. The only instance that AP's will be specifically mentioned will be to illustrate an example of good practice.

**Participation**
Below is a summary of who we consulted with and what methods to show the widespread consultation that took place during this project:

| | HISA Officer Conversation Method | HISA Staff Conversation Method | Conversation With | Board Representative Conversation Method |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Argyll | VC | VC++ | Chair, Secretary | VC |
| HTC | VC | VC+ | SMT Member | VC |
| Inverness | VC | VC | Secretary | VC |
| Outer Hebrides* | VC | VC | Secretary | VC |
| Moray | Y | VC | Secretary and two Board Members (One chair of board sub-committee) | VC |
| North Highland | Y | VC | Secretary and Chair of Board sub-committee | VC |
| Orkney | Y | VC | Principal | VC |
| Perth | Y | VC | Chair, Clerk and Principal | VC |
| SAMS | Y | VC++ | Secretary | VC |
| Shetland | Y | VC | Secretary | VC |
| West Highland | Y | VC | Clerk | VC |

\* Changed from Lews Castle College during project.     + Prior to project commencing due to staff member leaving HISA

++ Prior to project commencing due to staff member leaving HISA (Same staff member covered Argyll & SAMS)

# Consultation Findings

What follows is a summary of key themes that came out during the consultation. These have been grouped into the following categories:

- Support

- Recruitment

- Training and Resources

- Relationships, Expectations and Perceptions

- Board meetings

- Other Comments

# Support

## Officer Support from Board

Most officers reported they had some form of support from a member of Board, whether this be the Chair, Secretary or Principal of their academic partner. When these were in place, officers commented this support was extremely helpful and that staff were very approachable ensuring that officers knew to ask for help if needed.

Where there was little or no support from specific board members, officers commented that they would like to see this in place. Where they were aware of support taking place or being from board representatives, HISA staff raised concerns that officers did not take up support offered by individuals and about the objectivity of this support when they were not fully aware of what support was offered – as will be seen throughout this report, this depended on the information given by HISA officers and staff's relationship with board secretaries. Staff also highlighted the challenges in providing equitable support for officers across HISA due to how different each board was.

In terms of other ways in which officers or student board members could be supported, it was suggested by Board representatives that when recruiting for new officers or Board members, HISA should let candidates know of support available to them and the value the student voice has on Boards. Some board representatives acknowledged timing meetings was a challenge with student board members and that they have tried to accommodate this where possible, but this has not always led to the student board members attending said meetings.

## Officer Support from HISA staff

Each AP and HISA officer will have a dedicated member of HISA staff. As well as helping officers achieve their objectives and other key HISA activities, staff members are also able to provide support for officers when attending board meetings. HISA staff predominantly work part time hours and can support more than one local officer, but a key role in this support to officers is preparation for board meetings – this can be from ensuring the officer knows when the meeting is, to helping them interpret papers and how this can impact students.

The support staff at HISA can provide, based on the conversations with officers, is dependent on their access to board papers. Where staff were able to access board papers, officers felt they were better supported and prepared for board meetings due to the impartial stance all HISA staff members take. Where staff had limited or no access to papers, officers either accepted this due to the confidential nature of boards or understood this confidentiality but felt it would be more beneficial in terms of aiding understanding and getting information based on prior knowledge of the AP which HISA staff based locally have. For those HISA staff who were able to access papers were conscious of the levels of support they provided officers and avoided giving specific notes on each paper by setting expectations on officers to read papers and ask questions at pre-meetings with their HISA staff member or whomever they met with go over papers.

Beyond the training provided at Executive Training, HISA staff would provide new officers with a briefing on Boards with the knowledge they had but many acknowledged that new officers would get information about boards through the handover from the previous officer.

HISA staff also highlighted that it would be good for all student board members to be able to have a pre-meeting with either the Board Clerk or Chair alongside their support from local staff to help aid student member understanding, allow them to ask questions and as another avenue of support. Post-meetings were also highlighted as useful, so officers were clear of next steps and any actions or requests for student input on decisions being made by Board.

| Activity | AP Takes Place In | Facilitated by | Impact of Activity |
|---|---|---|---|
| Meeting with Chair and HISA officers prior to meetings to go through agenda/student concerns | Inverness, Orkney, SAMS, Perth | Chair, Secretary | Officers feel listened by chair, feel able to contribute to meetings, board see significant officer contribution |
| Acroynym cheat sheet | Inverness, North Highland | Chair, Secretary | Officers have a better understanding of acronyms used and able to better understand and contribute to meetings |
| Incoming officers shadowing meetings | Moray, Shetland, Inverness, Perth, North Highland | Secretary, HISA Staff | Offers get insight into structure of meetings, better understanding and confidence in board, effective contributions to board |
| Overview of Board and subcommittees/members of board | Perth, Orkney | HISA Staff | Officers have better understanding of board and its members, empowered to establish better working relationship, more effective contributions to board |

Examples of best practice across UHI – not inclusive of all examples given

# Support

## Awareness of HISA party lines

As an independent political organisation, HISA members will vote to have stances on various issues within society and the wider UHI. There are referred to internally as party lines. Some of these party lines may clash with topics going to board so knowledge of these is important, especially when declaring conflicts of interest at the start of board meetings.

As these 'party lines' are decided within Executive Committee or at HISA Con, knowledge of these among HISA staff depended on their length of service within the organisation and how much their officers passed onto them from Executive meetings. All staff agreed that it would be good to have consistent reminders of these so that everyone within the organisation was aware – not just those who supported officers locally.

## Support suggestions and advice from HISA Officers

In other parts of the conversations had in this consultation, some HISA Officers made suggestions as to what could be done that would be useful for them in terms of supporting student officers in their Board role. Below is a summary of some of the suggestions made:

- Observing other Boards of Management within UHI to see the experience of other officers in HISA
- Publishing legislation and rules in place for boards so student board members understand the process and what to ask questions about
- HISA staff to be supported with understanding board so can help HISA officers and student board members
- Board members to sit down with student board member and offer support in pre-established format as officers may not be confident in asking for help
- Officers should get simplified version of notes – beneficial for new board members
- Board members should not make assumptions about knowledge simply due to being on the same committee as the student member
- Board to be mindful that student board members may have clashes due to their timetables when planning calendar of meetings

Officers were also asked what advice they would give to new HISA officers about Board of Management. Here are some examples from the advice given:

- Know the commonly used acronyms
- Actively listen to the conversations
- Get to know and research boards and board members and respect others' roles of board due to their experience
- Don't be afraid to speak up or challenge something affecting the student experience – it can be intimidating space, and may get talked over but keep calm and show through your comments and your work you have a right to be there
- Asking yourself "how will this affect students?"
- Read everything and come to the meeting prepared
- Ask for help when you need it
- Be confident to speak up as students are members of the board as well – do not get intimidated
- Student board members should not be held accountable by board – not their responsibility
- Do not say yes to anything in the room
- Good to have evidence wherever possible – get facts, figures or comments from students
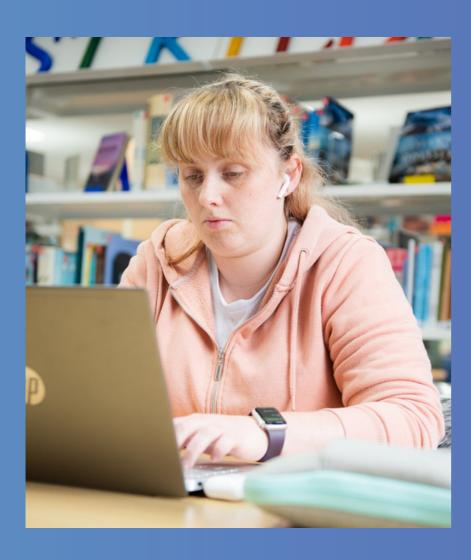- Do not be disheartened if things go slow or not the way anticipated

# Recruitment

In some APs, due to one local depute in role, there may be a need to recruit a second student board member. This is a requirement under the Education (Scotland) Act for those who follow this governance model.

The project team spoke to current officers, HISA staff and board representatives where this applied about this topic and how to recruit a second student board member.

Several key themes emerged from these conversations, including identifying an engaged student to encourage them to step forward alongside wider promotion of the role, promoting the benefits to the AP and the individual of getting involved in Board as well as the support offered, raising awareness of boards at local SVR meetings, a formal standardised process across the partnership with local contextualisation and exploring if the role can be incentivised.

# Training & Resources

**Skills Audit – HISA Officers and Staff**
When officers were asked what skills they felt were needed to take part in board meetings, the top responses were confidence in themselves and their position as a student member, communications skills, understanding the papers and what was being discussed, knowing and speaking on behalf of the students, and politeness. The full list of skills given can be found in Appendix 3.

To mirror the question asked to HISA officers, their staff counterparts were asked what skills they felt were needed by their officers to take part in board meetings. The top responses were close reading or reading papers, understanding their remit and priorities as a student board member as well as the politics of their local Boards. The full list can also be found in Appendix 3.

HISA staff were asked about the skills they felt they needed to support their officers at board meetings. The following skills were highlighted:

- Experience of UHI
- Experience of committees and board meetings
- Seeing and close reading of papers
- Training for new staff
- Patience
- Knowledge of board
- Relationship building with board secretary/other board representatives
- Same skills officers need
- Being able to summarise key points
- Objectivity
- Strong awareness of AP
- Report writing
- Supporting reading and writing skills

**Local inductions to Board**
In relation to AP-specific inductions, most of our officers had some form of induction to their local board. This would either be in line with induction received by other board members or have additional elements specific to the student board member(s). Three of the officers interviewed stated they had no formal board induction. Of the three, two mentioned they wished they had had some form of induction.

Examples of induction activities mentioned in conversations with HISA officers included:
- Induction with all new members of board
- Introductory meeting with Chair
- Introductory meeting with Board Secretary/Clerk
- Introductory meeting with Principal

# Training & Resources

Activities and suggestions mentioned by officers that they would have like in their induction included:

- Introductory meeting/people to introduce themselves and their role at the start of the first meeting officers attended
- Information on board activities and how meetings took place
- Induction to take place later in role once more knowledge about the officer role is known
- Formal explanation of processes and what committees do
- To have the same induction as new board members (where this did not take place)

Discussing this topic with Board representatives, where inductions and training were in place across the partnership, this would be made available to student board members. This would be in line with inductions and training other board members would receive, with others doing bespoke inductions or training for new student members.

**Training for Board – HISA**
For the last two years, HISA have run a simulation exercise for officers as part of Executive Training where they can experience a board meeting to get familiar with the structure, how to prepare for meetings and what issues may be important for students. As part of these conversations, the officers were asked about their thoughts on the exercise.

Positives that came out about this exercise from officers included:

- Useful –gave an idea of what happens at meetings
- Good to highlight when things can go wrong/when need to be observant
- Enjoyed it/was good
- Helped with board meetings at AP
- Helped when trying to explain terminology or what to look for in papers
- Most useful training – still refers to it/learned a lot from it
- Felt like a chance to face fears before going into board

Something that was picked up from these conversations was that the individuals within the simulation – who were purposefully created to be combative individuals – were not reflective of the experience of their board members and interactions, giving them confidence that the simulation was the "worst it could be."

Suggestions were given by officers on how to improve this exercise going forward:

- Have a way to step out of the simulation
- Emphasise importance of papers given so officers will read
- More time to prepare with staff member
- Ensure roles of all involved are clear
- Make characters less antagonistic/make simulation more neutral or positive
- Ensure enough time to debrief so know what did well and what can be improved on
- Make exercise an observed scenario to comment on, featuring returning officers.

**Training for Board – College Development Network**
The College Development Network (CDN) have a suite of resources for board members to take part in, including a specific induction for student board members. Six of the officers recalled going to the Student Board Member Induction. The majority said that it was useful, but they preferred HISA's training or found it more useful as the CDN training was generic.

Some officers mentioned doing online modules as part of their CDN training which included Audit training and Renumeration training. Officers who took part in this found the training quite vague and that it had an assumption they already understood these areas. Some officers suggested it would be useful to have a tailored one for students, linked with the Student Board Member Induction training that had more accessible language would be a lot more useful.

The rest of the officers either said they had not done any CDN training or training had been done via Brightspace or other training programmes.
Although not all APs are part of CDN, most board representatives were aware of the resources CDN had and the value they could bring to all board members, not just student members.

Comments were made by some board representatives that the resources need to be developed further and to be made more accessible for all board members. Specifically mentioned was the workbook around working with student board members and how valuable this resource was and that it would be beneficial to see this rolled out wider and expanded upon.

For those APs not aware of CDN resources, this would be because they were not part of CDN, but these APs did mention that a resource like this could be useful. One board represented suggested that UHI could add to CDN resources. They suggested that as soon as a student rep is signed up, that either UHI, APs or HISA could keep a log of activities, training, and attendance of meetings so that recognition could be given at the end to give added value to the local HISA officer and for those student board members from the wider student population.

# Training & Resources

**Advice for new HISA staff**

As with the officers, HISA staff were asked for advice they would give people starting within the organisation. Here is what was provided:

- Help officers/student board members think critically as a board member and stand up for student opinion
- Help officers prepare for board so nothing is missed, including making sure they are aware where a decision may need to be made
- Make officers aware of motivations of board members and where to take things "with a pinch of salt"
- Make clear to officers to ask for help when needed
- Make sure you have everything you need to support officers and student board members – ask for updates, access to papers or to observe a board meeting to strengthen their role and contributions to board
- Build a good working relationship with board clerk
- Make sure your officer sees the value of your contributions and support – this makes it more likely that your officers will come to you for help and fight for you if there are any challenges e.g., access to papers
- Research your AP and make sure you are familiar with their dynamic within the partnership and any major political ambitions
- Ask other HISA staff for advice or support if needed for supporting and preparing your officer/student board member



# Relationships, Expectations and Perceptions

**Officer perceptions of board meetings so far**

When asked their perceptions of board meetings so far, HISA officers remarked that they felt intimidated at their first meeting due to the strong personalities and discussions being held. They also felt nervous or unprepared due to the volume of pages they were to read, and the high level of decision-making taking place on boards and wished they have more confidence in themselves. What was clear was that boards were welcoming and supportive to new officers which helped put them at ease. A fuller list can be found in the appendix (Appendix 4).

**Expectations of student members**

Board representatives were asked what expectations they had on the student members of board. Many mentioned they were aware of the conflicting priorities that student board members had with studies and other HISA-related duties but stressed that due to the importance of decisions made at board meetings, that duties relating to it should be a focus. Every board representative mentioned the value of the student voice on board. Below are other expectations listed:

- Attending and contributing to meetings
- Asking questions
- Update Board on what is happening with students and what is relevant to students – preferably through a report
- Depends on the individual and what they want to get out of being on board
- Undertaking relevant training
- Ability to use software required to access board papers/board discussions
- Keep in touch with board contact and respond to emails relating to board
- Reading papers prior to meetings
- Same expectations as any other board member (where following Code of Good Governance)

**Perception of student members so far**

When asked how they had perceived student members on board to date, the answer depended on the personalities and interactions previous officers had with board so there was a lack of consistency in this way. Where there had been limited interaction, board representatives commented that it was hard to know what work the officers, and therefore HISA, were undertaking to due to the officer not attending all meetings or a lack of verbal or written reports being given to board.

# Relationships, Expectations and Perceptions

Where there had been a lot of interaction from officers, some board representatives commented on how these officers would contribute to meetings and provide good insights or present good queries. Other board representatives mentioned that although coming along to meetings, student member contributions were less than those of other board members.

Some board representatives recognised that confidence to speak and to interact with board members would be a significant contributing factor in how well that officer engaged with board meetings. A few suggested that insight into how to help student members overcome this would be appreciated, with one suggesting that bringing in some form of mentoring scheme, in line with CDN guidance, could be beneficial. HISA staff commented that due to them not sitting on board that they could only go by the information provided by their officers about board.

When information was provided, HISA staff said that the officer's confidence levels, or experience would impact their attitude to board meetings but that they would support officers as much as possible with the resources and support given.

Staff who have supported more than one officer at boards were asked for consistent challenges they had seen with officers. Challenges mentioned were officers feeling comfortable and confident in role, not having an idea of the bigger picture, communication issues and not being able to fully support officers depending on staff's access to papers.

## Relationships with HISA
When asking about the relationship board representatives had with the HISA staff member based locally, this was split into either having no relationship or a positive one.
Where board representatives did not have a relationship with HISA staff, this would be attributed to not understanding the role HISA staff play, the staff member not reaching out or being proactive in building a relationship.

Where there was a relationship, board representatives noted they enjoyed the positivity of this relationship and the open channels of communication alongside the benefit staff had on helping officers prepare for board meetings.
As highlighted in the summary of Board Representative conversations, HISA staff echoed that this was either non-existent or a strong relationship. Where no relationship existed, some staff members cited this was dependent on the governance structure but all staff this applied to said this affected the support they could provide their officer.

Where a relationship did exist, HISA staff highlighted they could make contact when needed with any queries and that board secretaries were always keen to offer support to staff and officers when needed. With this relationship in place, staff members noted that satisfaction with HISA at a local level would increase.

## Understanding of HISA
When asked about their understanding of HISA as organisation, the conversation split into two areas – understanding of local HISA activities and understanding of regional HISA activities.

In terms of local HISA activities, some board representatives mentioned they were not given a lot of information on this so did not have an awareness of how HISA interacted with their students. These board representatives mentioned that they would like to see some form information around local objectives to be updated upon throughout the year. Where information or reports were given, board representatives said they understood what HISA did locally.

How local activities fitted into wider HISA activity, how HISA worked and its wider impact on students were cited as areas were board representatives' knowledge lacked. Suggestions on how to improve this would be a summary paper of HISA's structure and policies or even a presentation on HISA.

## Board Meetings
**Paper circulation timelines / Understanding of papers/ Preparedness for board meetings**
In terms of the timeline for papers to be circulated prior to meetings, there was not a lot of consistency. Overall, officers said that papers would "usually" be circulated 7 days before board meetings, which would give them adequate time to read and prepare for meetings.

# Relationships, Expectations and Perceptions

Other officers mentioned that papers could be circulated less than a week before meetings, with a few mentioning papers from board could be circulated the day before meetings – this would occur for either late papers or for full board papers.

When this occurred, officers mentioned this would make it hard to understand some papers, depending on the subject matter and the language in which it is written.

Regardless of when papers were received, if officers were unsure of content, they reported that there were people that they could ask – staff members of board, chairs, secretaries, or HISA staff. Officers that were able to have pre-meetings noted these were incredibly helpful in terms of understanding papers and feeling prepared for board meetings.

HISA staff further verified the timelines of papers being circulated usually a week prior to meetings. Staff commented that if papers came out later this was not enough time for officers to read and prepare for meetings alongside their other HISA duties and studies. When asked if HISA staff had access to papers, this was mixed.

Many staff were reliant on the information their officers provided them, some were able to see some papers due to the relationship they had built with the board secretary and others had no access to papers so felt unable to support their officer prior to these meetings.

As covered in the conversations with HISA officers, board representatives verified papers for board would be circulated generally a week before the meeting took place if they were responsible for paper dissemination.

The only exception to this was Orkney as their Board (known as College Management Committee) is overseen by employees within the local council but timelines are well known. Reasons given as to why papers would be circulated later included late papers being submitted or the capacity of the secretary given their hours or additional responsibilities.

**Communicating Board decisions to Student Voice Reps**
As a key group linking HISA officers to the student body, Student Voice Representatives (SVR) need to be aware of what is happening at APs so this can be communicated to the wider student body.
The way in which officers felt the best way to do this was mixed. For those officers who communicated board activities already used a variety of methods like discussion boards, meetings with SVRs or via email. Many officers mentioned that engagement issues with students meant it was challenging to share information this academic year, but some suggestions were made, such as signposting SVRs to where board papers were published online, having an idea of what can or cannot be share or circulating minutes electronically.

Similarly, to HISA officers, staff highlighted that engagement had been a challenge this academic year but that key information like board activities should be fed back to SVRs in some way.

**Anything returning officers wish they knew before starting to attend Board meetings**
Officers who were sitting on boards for their second year were asked if there was anything they wished they knew before they started attending board meetings. The following examples were given:

- Acronyms!
- More contextualised information about AP
- Board is not intimidating as it may have appeared at first
- It's ok to make mistakes
- A clearer statement of expectations for student board members
- Declarations of interest in relation to HISA policies

# Relationships, Expectations and Perceptions

**Other Comments within conversations**
This final section is additional comments left within the report that do not fit in with any sections but is useful to include.

**HISA local officers**
- Board members should not make assumptions you know all the stuff just because on same meeting

**Board Representatives**
- Getting feedback on how student rep feels coming to board and what they have gotten out of it would be beneficial
- Board surgeries could be beneficial
- This exercise should be run every 2-4 years
- Strategies to increase student engagement with Boards – both student members and the wider body of students
- Age of student can skew student view – needs to be balanced between FE and HE, young and mature etc.
- Good MSYP representation and lots of people pushing the agenda for students – is there scope to look at 14–16-year olds represented through HISA/board?

**HISA Staff**
- Timing of meetings - some are great and have meetings around 4 o'clock or out with student time, others held during class time that the officer could not get out of. Need to take into consideration of everyone who attends board - make standard to early evening so all students can get to it.
- Cannot try to play down the board or treat it as unimportant – the meetings would not happen if they weren't important, so prioritise getting officers to a place where they are confident, know what support is available, and can thrive on the board to the best of their abilities despite the additional challenges that the board environment can pose.

# Recommendations

Based on these conversations, the following recommendations are being made based on the contents of the interviews with the different participants. These recommendations have been made taking the differing governance models across the UHI, but additional recommendations have been made that can also be taken into consideration where applicable.

Our main recommendation is for a Board of Management Action Plan to be utilised across the partnership. This action plan will include key elements for each of the three main bodies of people mentioned throughout this report as outlined below to ensure uniformity of support and accountability towards our officers and student board members across the partnership:

**HISA Officers**
- Proactively ask for support for board meetings from board representatives and HISA staff
- Fully utilise training opportunities
- Build good relationships with board representatives
- Attend and fully contribute to board meetings
- Regularly update board of HISA activity both locally and regionally, ideally through a written report

**HISA Staff**
- Ensure officers are prepared for board meetings and understand their role
- Help support officer to develop skills relevant to board
- Staff to take part in relevant training
- Build a relationship with board representatives, specifically secretary
- Ensure have a strong knowledge of AP and HISA party lines
- Support officers to regularly update board on HISA activity both locally and regionally, ideally through a written report

**Board of Management Representatives**
- Invite incoming HISA officer/student member to shadow board meeting
- Set up an introductory meeting with board chair and secretary as part of officer induction
- Build a relationship with HISA staff based locally
- Ensure students members can attend meetings around study commitments
- Set up a regular meeting with HISA officers prior to board meetings
- Make selves available to officers for support

# Recommendations

# Next Steps

**Board of Management Representatives (Continued)**
- Prepare an induction for student board members either separately or as part of other board member inductions
- Consider use of CDN resources

As well as HISA staff, officers and board representatives taking on and implementing the recommendations of this report, we hope to see the following as indicators of the project being a success:
- Positive feedback from HISA officers around training and induction run by HISA
- Positive feedback from HISA officers and HISA staff around training and induction run by APs/external organisations
- Positive feedback from new HISA officers about their first Board of Management
- Positive feedback on improved relationships between local HISA officers and board representatives
- Positive feedback from board representatives about student member input and contribution
- Full attendance at board meetings from at least one student member
- Increase in board's awareness of HISA as an organisation

The proposed action plan can be seen in Appendix 5.

This report will be presented within HISA's own committee structures, with input and approval from HISA Management Board and Executive Committee. It will also be circulated to members of General Practitioners Quarterly for comment before going to each AP's board of management for discussion and approval of recommendations. The report will also be circulated to participants in the consultation.

Action plans, much like the Student Voice Rep Working Agreement, should then be completed with actions allocated to local HISA teams and local Boards, with clear timelines of completion to be reported within appropriate committees in APs. HISA teams, especially Assistant Voice Managers (AVMs), will provide support in this to ensure consistency across the partnership.

The outputs of this project will also be shared with sparqs, NUS (National Union of Students) Scotland and CDN as part of their ongoing developments in supporting college students.

# Acknowledgements

The project team would like to thank each board representative, especially members of GP's Quarterly, for their enthusiasm for the project's aims and for coming to the conversations with an open mind. Thanks also go to local HISA staff for being forthright in their views and have their students interests at the heart of everything they do. Finally, thanks go to the HISA Officer Team 2021-2022 – Board of Management is a great responsibility that has its challenges but by participating in them to the best of your ability and being honest in these conversations, you will help make sure that student board members are fully supported and effective for their students for years to come.

# Appendix One
## Board of Management Project Plan

**Aim**
For each academic partner to have full and effective student members on their Boards of Management.

**Objectives**
- To create guidance and resources that support student members, HISA staff and boards.
- To have boards play an active role to ensure the student voice is heard

**Intended Outputs**
- Guidance for HISA officers, HISA staff, students, board clerks and boards.
- Working Agreement between HISA and Academic Partners (APs) on supporting student board members.
- Training and/or resources for HISA officers/staff/boards.
- Recruitment of 2nd student board member at relevant APs.
- Better attendance, contribution and engagement by student board members.

**Impact**
- Stronger partnership between HISA and its APs.
- More powerful student voice on Boards of Management.
- More effective student experience for students across UHI.

**Resources required**
- Time of HISA project team
- Time of local HISA officers/staff/clerks/members of boards/student board members

## Conclusion

This plan considers the benefits of partnership working with the value and importance of the student voice to develop then evaluate resources relating to student board members. It integrates the importance of staff input, the increasing complexities of the representative role and motivations for students taking up such roles whilst also addressing challenges for students within governance from both the staff and student perspective. The significance placed within the Scottish sector of student involvement within decision-making alongside key developments and resources for student board members, this project is both timely and appropriate.

With full participation along with thorough consultation, the resources created will be useful and address concerns stakeholders may have. Although challenging to find resources that suit the needs of all involved, with guidance and support, testing of resources and subsequent feedback and evaluation can ensure suitability and enable consistent application. The outputs of this project will benefit student board members, boards and HISA, line up with strategic priorities and will ultimately amplify the student voice, giving students across UHI effective representation at the highest decision-making body at their academic partners.

# Appendix One
## Board of Management Project Plan

| Stage | Actions | Success Indicators | Target | Who | Challenges | Mitigations | Original Timescale |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Research | Read Literature | Literature identified | 5 | HISA Project Team | Not finding adequate resources | Liaise with College Development Network/sparqs | Nov-Jan |
|  | Identify best practice across sector/UHI | Best practice identified | 1 |  | Not finding examples of best practice | Input from stakeholders/CDN/sparqs in consultation stage |  |
| Investing | HISA staff to support | HISA staff identified | 2 | HISA Project Team<br>Board Clerks/Chairs | No volunteers/lack of buy in | Sharing project rationale/research | Nov-Jan |
|  | Boards to support/participate | Board members identified | 2 |  |  |  |  |
| Consultation | Create consultation question | Consultation designed | 1 | HISA Project Team<br>HISA staff/ officers<br>Board Clerks/Chairs | Availability of consultees | Project team to be flexible in consultation | Dec-Feb |
|  | Consulting with HISA local officers | HISA officers consulted | 21/21 |  |  |  |  |
|  | Consulting with Chairs/Clerks of Boards | Boards consulted | 12* |  | Lack of interest | Sharing project rationale/research |  |
|  | Consulting with HISA Staff | HISA staff consulted | 11** |  |  | Ensure thorough consultation |  |
|  | Identify resources to be created | Additional resources created | 1 |  | Lack of information in consultations | Use of CDN/sparqs resources/training |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | Resources not identified as useful |  |  |
| Creation | Resources for HISA officers/students | Resources created | 1 | HISA Project Team | Adequate resources not created | Address all points raised in consultation where possible | Feb-April |
|  | Resources for HISA Staff | Resources created | 1 |  |  |  |  |
|  | Resources for Board clerks/chairs/members | Resources created | 1 |  |  | Deadline set for stage of project to be completed before initial feedback stage |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | Resources not created in ample timeframe for feedback |  |  |

# Appendix One
## Board of Management Project Plan

| Stage | Actions | Success Indicators | Target | Who | Challenge | Mitigations | Original Timescale |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Initial feedback | Resources shared with HISA officers/staff/board members/students | Resourced shared | 1 | HISA Project Team<br>HISA staff/ officers<br>Board Clerks/Chairs<br>HISA Trustee Board<br>UHI Student Engagement Team | Resources not shared in ample timeframe for implementation<br><br>Resources not reaching appropriate people | Deadline set for start of new board meetings in 2022/23<br><br>Regular updates given to board contacts for wider dissemination | May-July |
| | Gathering initial feedback | Feedback gathered | 46^ | | Resources not useful | Encouraging feedback from all key stakeholders | |
| Implementation | HISA to implement resources for officers/staff/students<br><br>Clerks/Chairs to implement resources | Officers/HISA staff/board members receiving resources<br><br>Local HISA teams implementing resources<br><br>AP boards implementing resources | 44<br><br>12*<br><br>12* | HISA Project Team<br>HISA staff/ officers<br>Board Clerks/Chairs | Resources not implemented<br><br>Resources not implemented fully | Local HISA teams to work with local staff at AP to implement | Aug-Oct |
| | | | | | Resources not useful | Feedback gathered after implementation/findings from consultation addressed/acted upon | |
| | | | | | Unable to recruit 2nd student board member | Create effective promotional plan supporting recruitment based on consultation findings<br><br>System in place to cover 2nd student board member agreed as part of consultation | |
| | | | | | Inequality of staffing resources across partnership | HISA Project Team to provide additional support to local teams/APs | |
| | | | | | Reputational risk to HISA as effective students' association | Regular updates to key stakeholders to ensure transparency/project remains fit for purpose | |

# Appendix Two
## BoM Resources across UHI 2021/2022

| AP | Secretary/Clerk | HISA Officers/ on board | Hours | Committees other than Board | HISA Staff | Hours | 2nd Student Member? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Argyll | Yes | 1/1 | 12 | Learning Teaching and Enhancement (LTE) | 1 | 17.5* | N |
| HTC | Yes – undertaken by VP | 1/1 | 8 | Learning and Teaching | 1 | 8 | n/a |
| Inverness | Yes | 3/2 | 16<br>12<br>12 | Course Committee<br>Learning, Teaching & Resource<br>Student Journey & Enhancement<br>Health Safety & Wellbeing | 1 | FT | n/a |
| OH | Yes | 1/1 | 12 | Finance | 1 | 12 | Y |
| Moray | Yes | 2/2 | 14<br>14 | Audit<br>Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee<br>Finance and General Practice<br>Health and Safety | 1 | FT | n/a |
| NHC | Yes | 1/1 | 12 | General Finance<br>Learning and Teaching | 1 | 12 | N |
| Orkney | Yes – part of council | 1/1 | 10 | Access and Inclusion<br>CONTEST Committee<br>Learning Teaching and Qualifications (LTQC)<br>Induction Committee | 1 | 15 | N |
| Perth | Yes | 3/2 | 35<br>10<br>10 | Learner Experience<br>Strategic Development<br>Finance and Resources<br>Audit<br>Health and Safety | 2 | FT and 21 hours | n/a |
| SAMS | Yes | 1/1 | 8 | Education Quality and Assurance Committee (EQAC)<br>Programme Meeting Group<br>Education Committee | 1 | 17.5* | n/a – companies act |
| Shetland | Yes – dual role as Assigned Colleges Support Officer | 3/1 | 8 | Senior Management Group<br>Academic Board<br>Quality Improvement Committee<br>Operations and Estates | 1 | 21 | N |
| WHC | Yes | 1/1 | 12 | Finance | 1 | 12 | n/a – unincorporated |

*Same staff member supporting each AP

# Appendix Three

Full List of Skills Identified by officers and HISA Staff for Board of Management

| Skills from Officers | Mentions | Skills from HISA Staff | Mentions |
|---|---|---|---|
| Confidence | 6 | Reading/close reading | 5 |
| Communication skills | 6 | Understanding their remit/priorities as student member | 3 |
| Understanding papers/what is being discussed | 6 | Understanding politics of board | 3 |
| Knowing/speaking for your students | 3 | Confidence | 3 |
| Politeness | 3 | Understanding role of board | 2 |
| Getting to know board/skills of members | 2 | Organisation | 1 |
| Being there | 2 | Resilience | 1 |
| Time management | 2 | Calm under pressure | 1 |
| Note taking | 2 | Respecting difference of opinion | 1 |
| Listening/active listening | 2 | Communication | 1 |
| Knowing what can/cannot get away with | 1 | Politeness | 1 |
| Knowing own limitations | 1 | Report writing | 1 |
| Preparation | 1 | Negotiation | 1 |
| Being a critical friend | 1 | Active Listening | 1 |
| Knowledge of abbreviations | 1 | Self-awareness | 1 |
| Managing others | 1 | Public speaking | 1 |
| Knowledge of AP | 1 | | |
| Knowledge of UHI | 1 | | |
| Writing and summarising | 1 | | |
| Close reading | 1 | | |
| Organisation | 1 | | |
| Focus | 1 | | |
| Punctuality | 1 | | |
| Resilience | 1 | | |
| Chairing meetings | 1 | | |
| Knowing when to speak | 1 | | |

# Appendix Four

**How officers have found board meetings so far**

- Scary at the start
- Good to have another officer/student there
- Board members supportive/fantastic - good people/environment and welcoming
- Good, great to get views across (when been in one), enjoyable
- Difference between local and merger boards
- Expectation officers already aware of what is going on – would be better to understand this
- Can be hard to understand discussions/information on papers at all times– e.g., finance, data – sometimes can't concentrate
- Informing and interesting/ one of the things enjoy most about role/found diversity interesting
- Feel able to interact and listened to – able to come in and speak if in person or online
- Regard as most important meeting in the college
- Can feel nervous going into meetings considering the people that sit on them and their experience
- Felt was not prepared at the start – am now
- Well run but long!
- Some sections feel irrelevant e.g., business
- Transparent, forgiving if unsure/misstep
- Once understood what board was and who members were made sense - Board Meeting for Dummies!
- Wish had more confidence before starting!
- As time gone on feel more respected and voice is valued - first meeting was laughed at although asked a good question!

# Appendix Five
## Board of Management Action Plan

Academic Partner  _____     Date  _____

| Key theme | Action | To be actioned by | Person(s) Responsible | Measure of success | Action to be completed by | Status | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Support | HISA Staff and Boards to create joint support for HISA officer/student board member to be able to participate in Board meetings | HISA Staff and Boards | | Joint support plan and action plan completed | July 2023 | | |
| | Student Board Member to utilise the support relevant to their needs | HISA Officer | | Officer attending pre-meeting support | October 2023 | | |
| Recruitment | Create standardised process and promotional materials for recruiting 2nd Student Board Members | HISA | | Process Created<br><br>Promotional materials created | July 2023 | | |
| | Support recruitment of 2nd Student Board members | Boards | | 2nd student board member recruited | October 2023 | | |
| Induction and Training | Student Board Member (s) induction to AP and AP Board | Boards with support from HISA Staff | | Induction attended | September 2023 | | |
| | Student Board Members to attend relevant training | HISA and Boards | | Training attended/undertaken by student board member | June 2024 | | |
| | Student Board member to have introductory meetings with Chair/Clerk/other relevant AP Boards | Boards with support from HISA Staff | | Introductory meetings held | September 2023 | | |
| Relationships, Perceptions and Expectations | Boards to have awareness of HISA, including local team | Boards | | Introduction to HISA presentation circulated/delivered to new and existing board members | September 2023 | | |
| | Boards to support HISA in providing regular updates to Board | Boards | | Deadlines for updates given to student members at start of year<br><br>Regular communication with HISA and board around updates | June 2024 | | |
| | Boards to relay expectations of Student Board members in line with governing guidelines | Board with support from HISA Staff | | Expectations document created<br><br>Expectations given during introductions/training | September 2023 | | |

# Appendix Five
## Board of Management Action Plan

| Relationships, Perceptions and Expectations (Cont.) | Local HISA team and Boards to have an effective and collaborative working relationship | HISA and Boards | | HISA officers having effective channel of communication with Chair/Clerk<br><br>HISA staff having effective channel of communication with Clerk | June 2024 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | HISA to have regular meetings with Boards to discuss Board and relevant student matters | HISA and Board | | Meetings set up and attended by both HISA and Board members | September 2023 | | |
| Board Meetings | HISA to provide regular updates to Board | HISA Officer with support from HISA Staff | | Regular HISA update given at each Board meeting | December 2023 | | |
| | HISA to actively engage and participate in Board Meetings | HISA Officer with support from HISA Staff/ Boards | | Attendance at meetings by HISA | June 2024 | | |
| | Boards to be able to ensure student board members can attend and fully participate in meetings | Boards with support from HISA Staff | | Chair and Clerk offering support to student board members<br><br>Student board member contributions noted | June 2024 | | |

# Appendix Six
## Feedback from 2022/2023 Cohort

Considering the feedback for this project in academic year 2021/2022 and changes to offices and personal since this time, to ensure the feedback still resonated and the projects outcomes was still appropriate for the organisation, staff and officers were consulted on the first draft of the report.
HISA staff were asked for general feedback on the report and its recommendation alongside any challenges they foresaw at their academic partners in the implementation of the project.

As HISA has a lot of new staff joining the organization since the initial consultation, those newer staff members did not have a lot of firsthand experience with local boards. That being said, all staff were complimentary of the work that went into the report, the recommendations made were reasonable, achievable and could make the project successful as well as benefit all within UHI and how key the relationship with the board secretary could be. Staff also liked the idea of further training, support and development for themselves and officers alongside a standardized process for second student board member recruitment.

Challenges identified by staff included time resources of officers and staff, those on board and how they perceive HISA officers, officers proactively taking any help offered or not being able to engage fully due to other commitments in their role and class attendance. One of the biggest challenges was staff's ability to support officers with preparation for meetings if they were unable to access the paper's for said meetings. Staff were also unsure of the best way to feedback board updates to Student Voice Reps, but did feel that this would be a useful exercise.

Some additional suggestions coming from staff were local staff being able to attend or observe board meetings as a way to help them understand how the meetings worked and to better enable them to support local officers and second student board members. Some staff also suggested that it would be more useful for officers to meet with their staff member as an impartial adviser prior to any meetings.
When HISA officers were asked for their feedback, there were asked within an Executive Committee meeting and for those who either did not give direct feedback during the meeting or where unable to attend, feedback was asked for via email.

For those in attendance at Executive Committee, the responses were that they thought there were a lot of good points made that reflected their own experience, whether a new or returning officer, that this report would go down well at academic partners whether or not a good relationship already existed and it gives more clarity for the student member's role on boards. Officers also liked the idea of reporting local and regional work to boards so they had a better understanding of the role of HISA as an organization and the differences in the work of local and regional officers.

For those who responded via email the responses mirrored those of the officers at Executive Committee, with some officers commenting they were still new to the role and getting to grips with their Boards of Management but that the report was constructive with tangible action points, they agreed with what was written and it had a lot of information that was useful.

Suggestions made by officers included revising officer training so it is accessible for all, including a standardized approach to training around governance, especially for those officers who are elected after Spring Elections, through exploring the use of Brightspace, UHI's Virtual Learning Environment, for this training.

As well as feedback sought within HISA, members of BGPG were kept informed of the progress of the report throughout as this group were instrumental in the research and a way to sense check the recommendations from a board perspective. Feedback from BGPG members included an appreciation for the work that hand been done, that it would be important to distinguish the difference between an officer and a student board member and that an opportunity to develop on what is currently happening across the partnership is appreciated. BGPG members did raise concerns around the delivery of these recommendations due to changes within HISA including officer contracts and the departure of the Chief Executive Officer but, after reassurances from HISA on work being done as well as stressing that this project did not just impact HISA officers but student board members, BGPG members liaised with their individual boards and updated them on the progress of the report, with the aim of sharing the report during Cycle 4 of Board meetings in academic year 2022/2023.

# HISA

# UHI