

ACCOUNTABILITY PANEL MINUTES

DEC 2025

1.	In Attendance <u>Full-Time-Officers</u> Cameron Fields, President (CF) Holly McAdams, Vice-President Academic (HM) Lilja Piuli Alam, Vice-President Student Communities (LPA) <u>Accountability panel</u> Bruce Wilson, panel chair (BW) Isabel Bovo, panel member (IB) Lauren Gow, panel member (LG) Giovanni Miele-Norton, panel member (GMN) Lily Taylor, panel member (LT) Fraser Brown, Strathclyde Students Union President (FB) <u>Staff</u> Eliot Wooding-Sherwin, Student Engagement Coordinator (Projects and Campaigns) (EWS) <u>Apologies</u> Vincent Pemberton, Sports Union President (VP) Establish quorum Quoracy is met. Quoracy is 50% of the accountability panel membership plus 1.
Intro	

	BW: The panel is not here to interrogate, but to collaborate and create genuine feedback not about you as individuals, but about the work you have done and plan to do. We might be critical at times, and many of the questions we ask will be to build up a level of understanding, but it is because we want you all to succeed and be reflective of the work done so far.
2. VPSC	Panel questions BW: The panel notes that your report was late and we'd like to hear about what lead that to occur? LPA: I was very overwhelmed by work at the time and feel unable to go into further detail. FB: What is an example of a challenge you have faced in your role? How did you approach that challenge? LPA: Learning to manage my time. In this role you don't get a lot of time. I have approached this by starting to prioritise. I have used conversations I have had with students to identify what to focus on. IB: Appreciated the beach clean as this university is often lacking in opportunities for students to improve the environment. Is creating opportunities to be active in improving the environment something you could do more of in the future? LPA: I was discussing this with university staff before this panel so yes. I also am supporting with our community conservation project which offers opportunities for students to volunteer for the environment. BW: Just to follow up, how will that interact with planned University budget cuts? LPA: I don't think we need much funding in order to do sustainable activities. At least not for community gardens, beach cleans, or the student exchange. GMN: Your report notes that you have received positive feedback. I was wondering where you have received feedback from? LPA: I have received feedback from students in my 360 review. I had feedback from LGBT+ society about how much the clothes swap event meant to them. I also had positive feedback from society leaders about sustainability week.

	BW: From your report it is clear you have collected a lot of feedback from in-person conversations. Do you think you could do more with the big 6 and other ways the Union gathers data from students? LPA: I have learned this semester to write conversations by keeping a notepad. LG: I really appreciate your quiet communities project; I would have really benefitted from that when I was regularly on campus. I am interested in how the mandatory race training could be implemented? LPA: I have had lots of conversations about when to incorporate student leaders. I am working with Union staff to achieve this in first instance. My priority is to get Safeguarding to complete the training as they have a duty of care to students. I have been working with the University EDI trainer to develop the race training; he will run optional training sessions. FB: I think one of your big wins has been the group chats, I think that is particularly useful for engaging freshers. I think it's a big win to see in particular the anti-racism campaign group. How have you ensured leadership has stayed in the students' hands in that space? LPA: I have been questioning this. I want to see longevity in these projects. I am pushing proactive students to take the lead, for example I have been working with our Black Voices Advocates and have made many students admins in group chats to encourage them to feel ownership. Some society leaders have started posting and encouraging engagement, but it is still a work in progress. BW: What is the demographic of these students? Are they mostly freshers or returning students for example? LPA: I'm not too sure. I think there are a lot of students who were brought in during fresher's week and then other students encouraged new students to join. LT: If you could only pick one, what would be the top of your list that you want to focus on next semester? LPA: I would want to survey students to see. But if had to decide, continuing professional development and volunteer opportunities within the community conservation project. Other projects have other people already focusing on it.
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	GMN: You mention you chair the monthly society councils. Could you share one thing that is good about them and one thing you think needs improvement? I attend them and think they are quite good. LPA: I think it's a great way for society leaders to come together and have the opportunity to flag anything with us. I am working with staff to find ways to improve society council. We are keen to get society leaders to bring presentations with things they have been working on or want to champion. I feel the set-up of the meeting has also improved. The length of society council meetings is also something I am keen to work on. BW: I haven't attended a society council in a while and I really like the sound of that. A lot of these changes have been tested in the past; how will you ensure these changes will stay in place? LPA: I work alongside staff to chair the society council so staff will be able to work with the next VPSC to keep good practices. I will provide a detailed handover to the next VPSC. FB: I have a question about safe communities. You have said you want to identify key communities by the end of semester 1, what communities have you identified as your focus areas going forward? LPA: I had some chats with the EDI committee, and currently I have identified three groups. Racialised students, trans and non-binary students, and neurodivergent students. For racialised students I have been working on the antiracist university campaign. I am planning to put together a group for trans and non-binary students, so I don't have actions currently. I know CF has been working on a trans inclusion policy so maybe I can talk to him about that. Student Questions BW: What is something you are proud of? LPA: The student poster campaign is something I am proud of. A lot of students don't feel this is a building for students, so this is a way to remind them of it. It is a call-out to students to leave their mark on our walls through posters and pictures. Strengths • The group chats are good. Identifying and creating spaces for students.
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	- Looking at small but important issues. Such as poster space, small meetings, and group chats, and sustainability. - Prioritising safeguarding to do the race training. Development areas - Prioritising issues, activities, and focuses. - Improve closing the feedback loop – informing students of the work she has been doing. Increasing overall visibility. - Improve planning and outlining plans with a concrete list of actions. Putting more ownership on solutions for semester 2.
3. VPA	Panel questions IB: On the topic of GenAI, I am aware we can't fully get around use of AI. You mention responsible use of AI, how are you ensuring students use it responsibly? Do you have measures of responsible use for example? HM: I'm not saying that everyone must use AI. Important that if students enter a workplace where they are expected to use it, they have the skills. We don't currently have any measures of responsible use in place; the responsibility falls to students to ensure they are using it responsibly. I would like students to train themselves in AI. I am looking to develop training for Student Union volunteers. IB: I feel that for many students using AI doesn't necessarily promote skill development as it is often used as a shortcut. HM: I think it is a very interesting topic and we need to take a two-pronged approach. I can't remember the exact figures but it's something like 1 in 5 public sector companies are using AI and 1 in 6 private sectors. There is an expectation students entering the workforce know how to use AI. IB: Your report notes you want to create higher levels of confidence in the technology, AI obviously won't always give accurate answers. I am unsure if we want students to become more confident in AI.

HM: I could have framed this better. I'm focused on developing student confidence and critical thinking of AI.

FB: I wonder how your focus on AI balances with LPA's focus on sustainability?

HM: It isn't something we have considered previously. My focus is more on not punishing students for using it rather than promoting it. We could possibly look at that in future.

LG: I know you're very passionate about all your work. I am curious about where your passion for AI comes from?

HM: Personally, I don't use GenAI unless it really makes a difference in my effectiveness. My reason for focusing on it is more down to the major increase in academic misconduct cases we have seen. I am a strong advocate for not just creating guides but actually 'show, tell, practice'.

LT: I have a question about your wins and impact. What made Have Your Say unique?

HM: Previously we had academic congress which would be a traditional round table discussion with key University staff. Last year we had less than 10 reps attend so we have re-thought how we engage with students. This year we had a Have Your Say stall from department officers, academics, us, and other University services to ask students important questions. Students can now drop-in and interact e.g. through a marble run or ideas box.

FB: What actions have been taken to get lecture recordings?

HM: Staff are really hesitant. I have been utilising my relationship with Information services to create a guidance document. I have also been drawing attention to the NSS results. I am trying to address why staff are hesitant.

FB: Does this apply to all your campuses?

HM: I am mainly focussed on Scottish campuses, but I have regular meetings with student leaders at our other campuses and have shared what I am working on.

FB: I liked the photos in your report. Is there anything you have added to the role of VPA since the democracy review to set-up for future VPAs.

	HM: I have taken on the remit of all academic aspects, for example supporting PGR student meetings used to fall under the President but now under VPA, it's typically me who chairs the meetings but all FTOs attend. Engagement with University staff has remained similar. The new Tertiary enhancement framework has been something previously the President has looked at but it has been me leading on that within my role as VPA. BW: What do you think your most important work coming up is? HM: GenAI. I believe this could make a huge impact on decreasing academic misconduct cases. This is important as students could lose their degrees over academic misconduct. BW: The panel really appreciated your photos. We thought the format could be improved as it was difficult to read at times. Student Questions BW: what is something you are proud of? HM: Extending the Highmill opening hours for Gala students and embedding goals for our department officers to give them a steer on what to work towards.
	Strengths • Knowledge of academic side and how the University structures and student voices ties in. Professional connections and relationships uplifting student voice. • Following student data by focusing on preventing students from falling into academic misconduct. • Making meaningful progress with lecture recordings. Development areas • Communication and visibility towards students on the complete picture of what she has been working on. • Could be looking further into safeguarding tools to ensure students are critically thinking. • Representing student concern and fears on AI and capturing that more in her work.

4.	Panel questions
President	LG: I was really pleased with your report. One of your objectives is to prepare students for the 2026 Scottish election, could you explain how you are going to go about that? CF: We are looking to launch comms mid-late January. There are two key objectives, increasing student voters, secondly ensuring students are informed. I will be telling students what political parties have done for students e.g. through voting records. Additionally, I am going to be lobbying those political parties and getting politicians committed to fighting for students. FB: Your engagement with external officers has been deeply successful. How have you been working collaboratively with your fellow Heriot-Watt officers? CF: We have become more streamlined and siloed in our remits since our democracy review and that is something we are trying to breakdown. We have weekly FTO team meetings where we discuss what we're working on and how we can support each other to achieve our goals. For example, HM supports with my Ending GBV campaign by raising the consent matter module in university meetings. LT: I have a question about the consent number. You say there has been an increase in the number of completion rates from students, could you provide that figure? CF: cannot as the relevant staff is off sick. Roughly 30% students are completing it. GMN: I also have a question on the consent training; how effective do you think the module is? CF: The impact of the consent module goes beyond just completion rate. I believe the consent module plays a key role in a wider culture change. It ties in with the university new Report and Support system. About 60% students believe the university takes sexual harassment cases seriously. This figure is even lower when only looking at women and at people who have experienced it. Essentially the module becoming mandatory is a key first step. BW: What was the development in the consent module training?

CF: A previous officer lead on it. It is partnered with external organisations; it is the best one in Scotland that we are aware of.

LG: Your report notes you secured an additional £10,000 for the Advice Hub. I am wondering about the longevity of this, will it continue?

CF: Yes, it is absolutely a long-term thing. The University will also be making it easier for students to apply for the hardship fund from the university. The voucher scheme is quicker and with less barriers than the hardship fund - our block grant from the University will now include that money and is protected.

FB: How are you combining your Scottish elections work and democracy review into student engagement in the upcoming Student Union elections.

CF: That is a brilliant question and something I will consider more. We have seen more students engage in campaigning since our democracy review. Combining this in a clear narrative will help students engage in elections in general.

BW: You mention a lot about strong changes you've made but your plan changes is a much smaller section, is there a particular reason for that?

CF: As a second-year officer, I am a bit more aware of the remit and what is possible with the reality of the job. I feel I know more about what is achievable. The biggest plan change has actually given me more time as the housing bill went through Scottish parliament much sooner. I have been able to take a bigger focus on my Ending GBV work.

FB: If a student came up to you on campus, what would they say the biggest change you have made has been?

CF: Housing. Many students do come up to me and chat to me about housing. We got an 80% open rate from our housing email, which is unusually high, indicating how much students care about it. Also, students have really seen me fighting in their corner.

Student Questions

BW: What is something you are proud of?

	CF: I am really proud of my personal development. My development areas from my 360 last year came up as strengths on this year's 360. Strengths • Amount he has accomplished this semester. Report was concise but covered a lot. • Knowledge of his position, networking, and developing key contacts. Strength of the FTO team and working with them. • Knows what is important to students, his focuses are representative of student needs. Such as, the consent module building into a wider cultural shift and informing voters ahead of the 2026 Scottish elections. Development areas • Could put KPIs on some national work. Could tell students what he is planning to achieve before he leaves. • Ensuring there is a platform and strong handover for the next President. • Should consider the longevity of the campaigns he is involved in once he has finished his time, both nationally and within Heriot-Watt.
5. Conclude	Panel Balancing Deliberations The panel confirmed the strengths and development areas for each officer. BW: Thank you everyone for attending today's accountability panel and for your valuable questions, and many thanks to our external officer Fraser. If you have feedback on my chairing please also share it, this is my first time chairing this type of meeting so I would love to hear how to improve. Enjoy the rest of your day!