

APPENDIX 2**UNIVERSITY INNOVATION FUND – 2019/20****Update Report****1. INTRODUCTION**

The University of Aberdeen's Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has already set out the University's commitment to deliver its strategic objectives in line with the Scottish Government priorities detailed in the Scottish Economic Strategy and annual Programme for Governments in return for public investment. The process is intended to complement and support the University's strategic ambitions.

We confirm our ability to utilise and match the Platform Grant (PG) to support our programmes of:

- Commercialisation and business incubation;
- Knowledge exchange;
- Regional economic development and industrial engagement;
- Student Enterprise;
- Entrepreneurship education and training;
- Public engagement;
- Culture and societal engagement.

The details of the activities we will deliver through our support in these areas are included within our draft Outcome Agreement for 2019-20.

2. UIF OUTCOME GRANT

The University of Aberdeen will continue to contribute to the development of the UIF Outcomes Grant and its priorities in collaboration with the HEI sector in Scotland and other stakeholders.

3. COMMITMENT TO COLLABORATION ACROSS THE SECTOR VIA UNIVERSITIES SCOTLAND RCDG

In discussion with SFC, Universities Scotland has agreed that the best mechanism to work at a sector level to deliver the national outcomes is to undertake to work together to:

Analyse current activity and identify best practice

On the basis of this, where appropriate, devise and execute (a) pilot programme(s)

If successful, develop/initiate a sector-wide programme

Through Universities Scotland Research and Commercialisation Directors' Group (RCDG) each institution has agreed to contribute to various outcomes. Each institution notes and acknowledges the importance of each of the outcomes but for the best use of resource each institution will be involved with a different combination of work. Aberdeen will continue to work with the UIF Collaboration Manager to develop and use the framework for monitoring collaborative activity.

Aberdeen has committed to contributing to all outcomes. Following the May 2018 RCDG meeting on collaborative activity under UIF and the subsequent grouping of outcomes, Aberdeen has specific responsibility for leading the Innovation cluster of collaborative activities (in partnership with UHI and UWS). The main activities under the Innovation cluster relate to outcomes 1 – 4, encompassing increasing engagement and collaborative bids around ISCF calls, stimulating demand from SMEs for innovation, and developing researchers' skills for engaging with industry. Aberdeen will continue to lead on the ISCF and skills elements of the Innovation cluster, working in partnership with UHI on the SME demand stimulation activities and with the UIF Collaboration Manager, other HEIs, Interface, Innovation Centres, the Enterprise Agencies and other partners to deliver the objectives of this cluster of activities.

Aberdeen will continue to be an active participant in the other collaborative clusters (Internationalisation, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Growth and Equality & Diversity – Inclusive Scotland) and will contribute to workshops and other collaborative activities. As current chair of RCDG, Aberdeen has led the stakeholders' forum for the last 2 annual meetings, which included enterprise agencies, Interface,

Scottish Government and SFC. A summary of progress made or key developments against each of the individual outcomes is given below.

- **Outcome 1 - Demand Stimulation: “Working with enterprise agencies, SG, Business networks, Interface and others... help increase the demand and quality of engagement from businesses and the public sector for university services”.**

The University is a founding partner of the Aberdeen Region City Deal (ARCD) and provides senior leadership and engagement to ARCD through board membership. In collaboration with all the ARCD partners (Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils, the Robert Gordon University, Scottish Enterprise and Opportunity North East (ONE) (providing sector industry leadership)), the implementation strategy has been developed in response to the industry demand. The ARCD is providing opportunities for industrial engagement through projects that address industry needs and seeks to contribute to the economic development of the region through new job and company creation, particularly within the Innovation Theme of ARCD. The current five strands of Innovation include Oil and Gas, Life Sciences, Food, Drink and Agriculture, Tourism and Digital. Each strand includes activities around promoting and supporting entrepreneurship through accelerator programmes, which the University of Aberdeen is contributing to at various levels throughout the institution. City deal structures provide models of good practice for regional development, and where innovation is key to the strategy close cooperation amongst the academic, public and industry partners is essential. The Oil and Gas Technology Centre (OGTC) is now well-established and Aberdeen is in regular dialogue with OGTC Solution Centre Managers regarding project development and responding to thematic calls. Two projects are underway with eight others in preparation or under review. Additionally, we provide leadership at board level and academic expertise on OGTC review panels, The National Decommissioning Centre (NDC), a partnership between the University of Aberdeen and OGTC was launched in 2018 with its formal opening in January 2019. This Centre of Excellence will allow our academic researchers to work alongside industrial partners to create solutions that will establish the NDC at the heart of this important industry. The University was able to commit resources to this nationally important initiative through our UIF, but also the strategic investment fund awarded from the SFC. Working closely with OGTC, the NDC will enhance the interface between industry, researchers and regulators to provide each with opportunities to contribute to the development of the NDC research programme and to access the extensive facilities within the NDC.

Aberdeen will continue to work with ARCD partners and in particular ONE for the implementation of their business support programmes for the regional life sciences community, leading on activities such as bespoke boot-camps and accelerators for life scientists, and as a partner in the development of the Biotherapeutics Hub – an innovation hub set to double the number of life sciences businesses in the North-East - and planned to open in March 2021.

As a member of the Santander Universities Network, we are able to offer opportunities for businesses through our SME Internship Programme. On the back of its success over the last 4 years, we have built up a network of SMEs now accessing interns who previously may not have collaborated with universities. In collaboration with Santander and the wider network we are able to access, we use examples of the Internships to showcase the opportunities to access academic expertise and our highly skilled graduates. We have welcomed the shift in focus of the Network from 2019 towards inclusivity and widening participation.

We will continue our partnership approach with the Innovation Centres, Interface, and Knowledge Transfer Partnerships to enhance the demand from industry. Aberdeen will refresh and relaunch its Energy Institute in 2019, providing a 'one stop shop' and academic leadership for the energy industry and for addressing energy transitions, across a range of disciplines and providing training solutions.

- **Outcome 2 - Simplification / Commercialisation: “In partnership with enterprise agencies and Interface...demonstrably simplified business access to the knowledge and expertise in Scottish universities”.**

The outputs from the collaborative workshop led by Aberdeen held in 17/18 have fed into the development of the Innovation cluster of collaborative activities. A key aspect of the collaborative activity which complements our activity under Outcome 2 relates to engagement with industry particularly around ISCF opportunities. Aberdeen intends to appoint an Industry Partnership Officer

focussing on ISCF to build relationships with businesses seeking to develop new products and services under ISCF funding.

Aberdeen has refreshed its Industrial Engagement Strategy, concentrating on three main themes: Skills & Employability, Research & Development and Entrepreneurship & Innovation, with each of these themes providing goals to enhance our engagement with industry. In particular, the goals of Research & Development theme are aimed at developing strategic and long-term relationships with industry.

We are continuing the shift from transactional to partnership interactions with industry, with an emphasis on developing more strategic relationships with shared goals, and demonstrating to businesses the long term benefits of partnership. Working within the ARCD partners, this partnership approach enhances post project referral for further interactions and provides a model for regional collaboration. We will continue to provide a programme of training for researchers focused on the collaborative competencies to enhance engagement with businesses.

Aberdeen has been a strong supporter of simplifying processes and promoting efficient commercialisation, as demonstrated by our commitment to using standard templates wherever possible and our track record in commercialisation. Aberdeen is a member of the Universities Scotland RCDG Contracts Sub-Group which has already provided a range of commonly used contracts (promoted on Interface's website) supporting simplification and harmonisation of the process for businesses to access knowledge within all universities. We will continue to promote good practice and knowledge within our partnership with the ARCD and other multi party collaborations.

As current chair of RCDG's sub-group to support and promote good practice for spin-outs, we also continue to promote the agreed common principles within our institutional policies.

- **Outcome 3 - Simplification/ Greater Innovation: "In partnership with Enterprise Agencies and Interface... at a national level made use of their sectoral knowledge to promote greater innovation in the economy (including beyond non-STEM)".**

Aberdeen will participate fully in the SME Demand Stimulation Innovation cluster collaborative activities led by UHI. A workshop hosted by Aberdeen focussed on mechanisms to drive greater innovation in SMEs, with HEIs working in partnership with Interface, Innovation Centres and enterprise agencies. We also worked with Edinburgh and Glasgow on the highly successful ESRC-funded Business Booster project, aimed at engaging industry with social scientists.

Aberdeen has evidenced our commitment to engaging and collaborating with other universities and the enterprise agencies through our partnership approach in ARCD, but also our ongoing commitment to the long standing partnership of the North East of Scotland Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) centre. The KTP centre which is hosted between Aberdeen and RGU now includes the James Hutton Institute, Abertay University, Universities of Dundee and Highlands and Islands and SRUC. The demand for KTPs from both industry and university partners has risen significantly across all sectors, requiring an expansion of the team. The North East KTP bid and won the opportunity to host the National KTP Centre, which will take place in November 2019 in the new Aberdeen Conference and Exhibition Centre (TECA). Aberdeen's Professional Conference Organisation will support this conference.

We will continue our staff development activities, providing in-house training to staff and extending to external training and conferences as required. We welcome the opportunity afforded by our leadership of the Researcher Skills theme of the Innovation cluster to examine best practice in training researchers for engagement with industry and other stakeholders, and will adopt training that complements and enhances our current activities.

- **Outcome 4 - Entrepreneurialism: "(The) sector will have made significant positive change in the way entrepreneurial opportunities are promoted and delivered to students, HEI staff and businesses".**

Aberdeen will continue to support its ABVenture Zone incubator for entrepreneurs pre-incorporation and for micro-SMEs. We will also continue to host carefully selected non-student start-ups to ensure

a creative mix of entrepreneurs in the incubator. We will also provide a hosting opportunity for student entrepreneurs applying for RSE Enterprise Fellowships.

We will continue with our Lightbulb business ideas competition which has so far expanded year on year, supported by an Intern funded by the University. Focussed on developing early stage ideas and supported by student entrepreneurs, Lightbulb promotes entrepreneurial thinking. The University will work with Elevator and accelerator programmes offered by ONE to channel entrepreneurial staff and students into relevant accelerator programmes.

Aberdeen is an active and successful participant in the Converge Challenge competition, with a number of past finalists and winners. We will run internal workshops and business plan competitions to raise awareness, encourage entrepreneurship and provide support for promising early-stage start-ups with the aim of funnelling these into other opportunities.

Following on from our successful pilot 4-week summer accelerator programme for students, we aim to work again with Elevator to deliver an extended 8-week accelerator for student entrepreneurs, with bursaries for participants to support inclusive growth and social enterprises as part of our ABVenture Zone facility.

We will work with the University of Strathclyde which (with Stirling) leads the Entrepreneurship cluster of collaborative activities to ensure that programmes supporting entrepreneurship create a cohesive system for support to entrepreneurs. In particular, we are keen to provide leadership for a North East base to continue entrepreneurial support to students through an extension of the Enterprise Campus project, working with other HEI partners for its delivery. Aberdeen previously provided leadership for the North Hub of Enterprise Campus (ECN), which resulted in enhanced post-graduate student entrepreneurial activity over its 3 year term with ECN supporting the incorporation of 12 student business out of a total of 56 across Scotland, in line with the proportion of postgraduate students in ECN.

Aberdeen will contribute to the ongoing development of Scottish Enterprise's High Growth Spin out Programme, promoting to our potential spin-outs where appropriate.

- **Outcome 5 - International: "in partnership with SDI, Connected Scotland others...pooled knowledge and networks and shared good practice to promote and engaged Scotland internationally".**

Linked to our internationalisation strategy, networks are being used to enhance collaborative opportunities for our researchers. Examples include our status as a founding member of the new European Network, AURORA, our renewed commitment to the Confucius Centre, a global Alliance with Curtin University and the multiple partnerships supported by the Newton Fund and Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). We use the AURORA Network to provide a platform for enhanced collaboration and to seek new opportunities for research and knowledge exchange across Europe, particularly around sustainability, social inclusion and promoting mobility. We continue to share our experiences and good practice in Responsible Research and Innovation arising from various networks across the sector and with business; and in particular with European partners, funded by the NUCLEUS award.

We are progressing with the projects funded through GCRF and have used SFC funding for GCRF activities to appoint a specialist GCRF Business Development Officer and enable a pump priming fund to accelerate future applications. We will promote the UK Science and Innovation Network to our researchers and business contacts and enhance our use of Research management information to promote the sharing of networks.

We are undertaking a range of collaborative approaches in international projects. Notably, we are partnering with the Al Faleh Group for Education and Academic Services to open a £100M campus in Qatar, expanding the range of programmes offered by the University in Qatar to include STEM subjects, medical sciences, law, and politics and international relations. Aberdeen continues to support the University Innovations from Scotland project which is currently funded by a number of Scottish universities and is run out SDI's US East Coast office. We commit to using the Scotland is now branding where appropriate and contributing to the Connected Scotland project.

- **Outcome 6 - Inclusive Growth and Social Impact: building on current and good practice, Scottish HEIs will have scaled up their support of the Scottish Government's ambitions for inclusive growth**

Public engagement remains a priority – the University of Aberdeen's Public Engagement with Research Unit (PERU) maintains a calendar of popular events which include Explorathon, British Science Week and the successful lecture series Café Scientifique and Café Med. The Aberdeen-led *EXPLORATHON (European Researchers' Night, Scotland)* project, in collaboration with the universities of Glasgow, Strathclyde, St Andrews and the Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement was renewed in 2018. Many of the tools and approaches are now being used across other collaborative training networks funded by the EC.

The Wellcome Trust's Institutional Strategic Support Fund continues to provide enhanced opportunities for collaborative public engagement and we are engaged in the new Wellcome-funded ScotPEN Wellcome Engagement Award. We will deliver training programmes for researchers as part of these initiatives and also from our *Grants Academy* to support impact and working with industry. Our involvement with the St Andrews-led Cell Block Science project has resulted in opportunities for our researchers to engage with hard-to-reach audiences of prisoners and their families. Our work with SHMU (Station House Media Unit) in Aberdeen also promotes engagement with disadvantaged communities, supporting Aberdeen's goals in widening participation. The University of Aberdeen was the largest contributor of buildings to Doors Open day in Aberdeen in 2018 and will support this event in 2019. Aimed at a broad range of the public, a total of 3710 visitors took the opportunity to visit eight University buildings, where staff and volunteers provided tours of labs and facilities.

Our public research portal provides an enhanced approach to digital communication of our research activities, with access to the institutional repository of publications and, in addition, delivers researcher fingerprinting technology enabling identification of expertise. It also allows researchers, research users, business and members of the public to explore expertise and publications across all research areas within the University of Aberdeen.

- **Outcome 7 - Equality and Diversity: building on current and good practice, HEIs will have ensured positive promotion of equality and diversity in staff and all who are affected by the use of the UIF**

We will continue to ensure positive promotion of equality and diversity in staff and all who are affected by the use of UIF. We will continue to participate in the Heriot-Watt led Equality & Diversity collaborative cluster. Aberdeen has led the formation of an RCDG subgroup on Responsible Innovation, a forum which will have equality, diversity, inclusion and sustainable innovation as key themes. Sharing of best practice and information from these groups will inform activities and projects supported by UIF.