

ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

OUTCOME AGREEMENT 2023/24



INTRODUCTION

Looking back our achievements in 2022/23, the University made significant steps in its journey towards meeting its Strategic Aims and Enablers. All of our financial indicators (including tuition fee revenues) were exceeded and the indicators connected to the OA measures relating to retention, student satisfaction, student employability (at overall level and at professional level) and also the new measure on greenhouse gas emissions were met or exceeded. Furthermore, we recruited our highest ever proportion of Scottish domiciled undergraduate entrants from MD20 backgrounds, despite the challenges facing most Scottish institutions in relation to the recruitment of Scottish domiciled undergraduate entrants.

The University's strategy is amplified in a series of sub-strategies that have been approved by the Board of Governors. Three of these relate to each of the strategic aims, with the others relating to the core areas of the University's infrastructure. Collectively the strategy and sub-strategies outline an ambitious agenda for the University in terms of the University's financial and non-financial targets, and its critical success factors and key performance indicators, many of which align with the Outcome Agreement measures.

The scale of these ambitions in terms of the impact on the University's key performance measures over the period of our current Business Plan (2023/24 – 2027/28) can be summarised as follows:

- Student experience: we will maintain our high ranking for both employability and student satisfaction while increasing our ranking for retention;
- Course portfolio: we will develop an interdisciplinary and value-added approach to both our pedagogy and course portfolio;
- Research reputation: we will increase the proportion of staff that are research active, growing research outputs, grants and reputation around interdisciplinary themes;
- Economic development: we will significantly grow the depth and breadth of our engagement with external organisations and businesses;
- Entrepreneurship: we will be widely recognised as the leading Scottish University for Entrepreneurship;
- Alumni engagement and fundraising: we will significantly increase our alumni engagement and develop our fundraising capacity; and
- Carbon footprint: we will reduce our carbon footprint and achieve net zero by 2040.

The delivery of these ambitions are tempered in 2023/24 by the significant external challenges facing the University and, indeed the university sector. Our principal challenges for 2023/24 are reflected in the High-Level Risk Register and can be summarised as follows:

- **Recruitment to SFC funded places:** the University continues to face a challenging period in relation to recruitment to the funded number.
- **Tuition fee revenues:** despite significant success in diversifying our international on-campus recruitment, it will take time to offset the current reliance on Nigeria.
- **Public funding environment:** the University will need to respond to possible restrictions on the availability of public funding.
- **Cybersecurity:** the University is highly cognisant of the risks relating to cybersecurity breaches and/or crime.
- **Cost of living crisis:** the University is adversely affected by the impact of inflationary pressures on its cost base.
- **Student experience:** the University's performance in key metrics is affected adversely.
- **Energy Transition:** the University continues its focus on the changing needs of the energy sector, its workforce and the wider region during the transition.
- **Political environment:** it is important to recognise the potential implications of governmental change.

It is clear that 2023/24 will be a challenging year but we are committed to making positive progress towards delivering our ambitions and we are confident that the priorities expressed in this Outcome Agreement and the targets in the associated data table will be achieved successfully. The Outcome Agreement captures a high-level the contributions, impact and outcomes of the University's activities and use of SFC funding in the following priority areas as set out in the SFC's Guidance:

PRIORITY 1: FAIR ACCESS AND TRANSITIONS

PRIORITY 2: HIGH QUALITY STUDENT EXPERIENCE

PRIORITY 3: COHERENT LEARNING PROVISION

PRIORITY 4: WORKBASED LEARNING AND SKILLS

PRIORITY 5: NET ZERO AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

PRIORITY 6: HIGH QUALITY RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Annex B: University Innovation Fund 2023/24

Annex C: Case Studies

PRIORITY 1: FAIR ACCESS AND TRANSITIONS

Robert Gordon University (RGU) has a long-standing commitment to widening access to university, demonstrated through its deep-rooted approach in delivering credible, high-quality interventions which work by inspiring, supporting and enabling learners and their families to be confident and to engage in higher education. This approach is underpinned by our close partnerships with secondary schools, colleges and local authorities. Meeting the CoWA target for individual institutions is highly challenging for the University for reasons that have been well documented and discussed and were, indeed, identified in the original COWA report.

We support the principle that a broader set of measures should be applied to gauge institutional success in wider access, taking into account regional and local circumstances. The University has contributed to the Scottish Government Working Group considering a potential basket of measures for future use. Our widening access approaches focus on the improvement of opportunities for individuals and each success makes a real difference. Key strategic developments in 2023/24 will include:

- Building upon the recent successes of our school and college access programmes to promote greater access to RGU study for students from widening participation (WP) backgrounds.
- Enhancing our pre-entry and transitional support programmes to ensure WP applicants receive timely information, guidance, and opportunities to discuss their application with a member of Widening Access.
- Improving our transitional programmes for WP and college-entrants to ensure students are supported throughout their learner journey at RGU.

Engagement with secondary schools

We have a long-standing commitment to purposeful engagement with general education to senior phase secondary school pupils from within the Aberdeen city and shire region. Our school engagement programmes, in addition to using SIMD, use a wide range of indicators to identify disadvantaged pupils, including Free School Meals, first-in-family, care experienced, estranged from family, armed forces and veteran family backgrounds, and unpaid carer responsibilities at home. Since 2021/22 our RGU Hubs have expanded from an initial eight SHEP schools to a programme comprising of schools and our regional college partner, North-East College Scotland (NESCol). This development has taken place in line with the widening of the SFC's national programme to concentrate on individuals rather than schools because individuals with widening access indicators are present within all schools. The RGU Hub initiatives aim to embed our outreach activities within partner education institutions with a focus on enhancing relationships with staff and pupils. Our approach to engagement is underpinned by two pillars; the commitment to providing experiential learning opportunities and meeting the needs of individual pupils, and supporting the delivery of curriculum in our educational partners. Since the initial launch in 2021/22 the RGU School Hub initiative has seen annual expansion and is on track to include partnerships with all 28 local authority Aberdeen city/shire secondary schools by the close of 2023/24.

The RGU Hubs have consolidated longstanding outreach programmes such as our secondary school general education phase programme *Northern Lights* (S1 & S2 pupils), and our senior phase initiatives *ACCESS TO* (S5 & S6) and SFC-funded *Access to Creative Education Scotland* (ACES). Our *ACES* programme provides senior phase secondary school pupils from a widening access background with an opportunity to engage in subjects related to art, design and architecture

where demand for places is high. The success of a consistent physical and online presence afforded by the Hub model has aided our student recruitment activity, for example student enrolments from the initial eight Hub Schools increased by 11% in the subsequent academic year. Over the coming years, student attrition rates will be monitored to assess the programme's effectiveness in preparing students for higher education. Similarly, we have increased the number of pupils completing the Northern Lights course from 81 in 2018/2019 to 320 in 2022/23, ACCESS TO increased from 120 to 347, and our ACES project reports growth from 251 to over 400 pupils.

During the 2022/23 academic year, the University completed an extensive consultation with our partner regional secondary schools to identify areas where academics at RGU can support the curriculum delivery. As a result, in 2023/24, the University's eleven academic schools are supporting teaching across the Aberdeen region through school and university campus visits, use of specialised facilities and academic expertise at times that work with the curricula/timetables of individual secondary schools.

2023/24 priority actions:

- Increasing participation on the SFC-funded 'Access To' programme to over 1,200 senior phase pupils attending one of the 28 local authority schools within the region;
- Increasing enrolments onto our junior phase 'Northern Lights' programme to 1,000 per year;
- Expanding the RGU Hub Schools from 28 partner secondary schools in 2023/24 to all 28 local authority schools by the start of the 2024/25 academic year;
- Enhancing the ACES programme through the launch of a new ACES Summer School programme to support an ever-greater number of young people into arts, architecture and creative subject areas in higher education.

Engagement with college partners

The RGU HUB at NESCol fits seamlessly within our partnership model and has enabled us to deliver activities to develop aspiration and successful transition as appropriate to the College's needs and the UCAS cycle since its launch in 2022/23. Our objective is to further enhance this model to underpin our close-working and articulation relationships with other college partners. Building upon our developing relationships with colleges across Scotland, it is anticipated our *Degree Link* programme consisting of six partner colleges with articulation pathways will increase in 2023/24, providing opportunities for a greater number of college students to enrol on the 'Associate Students Scheme'. Associate Students study in the college and are issued with a RGU Associate student card, providing access to academic and online resources and University facilities helping to support a positive transition to degree study. Similarly, we have refreshed our Additional Funded Places (AFP) programme with our three partner colleges NESCol, Dundee and Angus College and Fife College. The updated AFP scheme provides the students with more university interactions related to their studies, enhanced transitional support and a guaranteed place to join a degree programme at RGU with advanced entry, subject to meeting the entry requirements.

We are working jointly with NESCol on the Pathfinder projects and the NESCol/RGU strategic partnership project has involved close collaboration between academic teams at both institutions to consider new articulation routes. This has resulted in three new pathways into Aberdeen Business School, and two new pathways into each of the School for Creative and

Cultural Business and the School of Computing. It has also facilitated discussion about the development of progression routes from FE qualifications into the first year of University study. Similarly, a focus for 2023/24 is to further development of our relationship with the Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP). With over 50 SWAP courses from ten college partners across Scotland offering progression routes to undergraduate degree study at RGU, we are committed to promoting progression to higher education for SWAP learners.

2023/24 priority actions:

- Establishing new articulation routes from college partners across Scotland;
- Creating new progression routes from college-delivered SCQF level 6 courses to first year study;
- Embedding the work of the SFC-funded Pathfinder College Project into our admissions policies to promote enhanced access for NESCol students to receive full-credit and advanced standing into RGU;
- A calendar of joint initiatives to celebrate diversity and inclusion in further and higher education study is planned for 2023/24, which will include multi-campus events to raise awareness of students from care-experienced, estranged, unpaid carer, and Armed Forces families with a focus on future career and university study opportunities a key priority.

PRIORITY 2: HIGH QUALITY STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The first strategic aim in our Strategy is to provide students with an excellent experience that will enable them to raise their aspirations and thrive in their professional careers as global citizens. Our ambition is to excel in teaching and learning quality and student experience and we aim to be in the upper quartile in UK institutions for continuation and employability.

High quality, safe and supportive learning environment enabling success

Building on our mission to transform people and communities through high quality education, it is extremely positive to see the positive impact of our strong student staff partnership and our commitment to continuous enhancement in 2022/2023. Our performance in NSS2023 ranked us 9th in the UK and 2nd in Scotland for overall positivity rate (as per [The THE](#)). The University scores significantly above its expected benchmark performance across the survey, with overall positivity at 6.4% above benchmark. There are strong subject performances and increases in all question themes within the survey, particularly pleasing has been the strong performance and increases in satisfaction with the questions relating to assessment and feedback. Additionally 19 subject areas rank in the top 3 in Scotland and 17 are in the top 20 in the UK. Students in Stage 2 and 3 of their undergraduate study and taught post-graduates have also reported their highest ever level of satisfaction, with 90% satisfaction overall. Our outstanding performance is also reported by research postgraduate students, with 97% of research post-graduate students satisfied with their course. The new [Daily Mail University Guide 2024](#) was the only domestic league table that used NSS2023 as its source and we ranked in the top 10 in the UK and 2nd in in Scotland for teaching excellence and 3rd in Scotland for student support and for student experience.

The OA measure E1 (the continuation of Scottish-Domiciled undergraduate entrants who return to study in year 2) has been adopted as a University Key Performance Indicator and we have met this. However, we are committed to improving performance in this area and to maximising retention across all stages and work has started on enhancement with the implementation of a University Attendance and Engagement Policy, the roll-out of the use of the Attendr app to monitor attendance and engagement and facilitate supportive contact with students at appropriate points and development of in-year monitoring of withdrawals allowing identification of key areas of concern.

The University has invested to ensure that the student community can access dedicated academic, pastoral and student support services and we know from NSS 22/23 that students are year on year more satisfied with the welfare resources and facilities at RGU. The Scottish Government's provision of counsellor funding has been carefully used to tailor the counselling services to student need leading to RGU waiting times for counselling to be amongst the lowest in the sector. Despite the reduction in funding for 23/24 we continue to use a mixed model of counselling provision and offer out of hours appointments. RGU continually enhances student support policies and guidance in accordance with student and sector need, in 2022/2024 we embraced the guidance from UUK and US in terms of suicide prevention and we are actively engaged with Scottish Government consulting on Student Mental Health.

During 2022/2023 RGU implemented a University wide project that was entitled the Future of Teaching, Learning and Assessment. Students were closely involved in this project it was co-

chaired by the VPADSE and the Student President (Education and Welfare) and each working group involved student representation. Student focus groups were conducted to ensure all the standards were co-created. The aims of this project were:

- To develop and articulate a clear vision for RGU's future model of teaching, learning and assessment leading to the creation of a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy.
- To develop a shared vocabulary across the University to describe features of the RGU student experience.
- To ensure consistency of the RGU student experience drawing on the best of existing practice from across each of the academic schools.
- To transform the assessment workload enabling students to balance study, work and personal commitments more effectively; to engage more readily with formative learning activities throughout their studies; and to be better prepared for summative assessments.
- To transform the assessment workload enabling staff to commit more time to support students with formative activities throughout their course and to help balance marking, teaching, research, and professional development commitments more effectively.
- To increase in-person time with staff and peers following extended periods of disruption in secondary, further, and higher education and enable enhanced support for students.
- To message clearly to students the importance of attending and engaging with their course and support students to re-engage in the event of attendance or engagement challenges.
- To further enhance the accessibility of courses and equity of experience for students.
- To help increase the confidence of both staff and students to engage in critical and meaningful discussion on more challenging curriculum content.

An external evaluation of this project has been undertaken and throughout 2023/2024 we will be making enhancements to the FTLA standards to optimise the student experience.

Our commitment to delivering additionality to our students has been enhanced with the launch of the RGUplus programme, which encompasses the wide range of opportunities, experiences and learning delivered at RGU to prepare all of our students to be excellent global citizens, making a positive difference to themselves and the world where they will work and live. It includes three pillars; the cross-cutting themes of **sustainability** and the **entrepreneurial mindset** delivered throughout our course curricula and the additional **Beyond the Classroom activity** (community credit / award bearing learning) that our students are offered and benefit from (i.e., volunteering, sports clubs and activities, community engagement experiences or placements, student mobility, and public service opportunities such as charity trustees).

Student participation and engagement in educational experiences

The University aims for continuous improvement to the student experience through partnerships with students and the Students' Union. The Student Partnership Agreement is owned jointly by the Students' Union and the University and includes annual objectives agreed collectively. Student Voice meetings are held quarterly and are led by the Students' Union with Executive and senior manager attendance and the Vice Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience meets with the Students' Union Presidents monthly. Our approach to collaborating with students to enhance the student experience has received national recognition, with the University being awarded a Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence from AdvanceHE. The Award demonstrates the University's commitment to working with students to deliver a positive student experience – even during a challenging time. The University has a

Student Representative system whereby students take on responsibility to liaise between students and staff, usually on a course basis. Student Representatives also participate in the staff/student liaison mechanisms within each School. The University's approach to collaborating with students to enhance the student experience has received national recognition, with the University being awarded a CATE from AdvanceHE in August 2022. The Award demonstrates the University's commitment to working with students to deliver a positive student experience – even during a challenging time.

The RGU:Union Executive Committee consists of elected student officers who have regular formal and informal contact with the University, including representation on the Board of Governors. The Student Partnership objective for 2023/24 will focus on exploring and embedding the concept of fostering an engaged and inclusive student community, based on evidence from our internal student feedback mechanisms that work needs to continue to enhance students' sense of belonging.

2023/24 priority actions:

- Further enhancement of Attendance and Engagement Policy, which provides clear guidance on the trigger points for supportive intervention; the nature of the interventions that should be used at defined points; and the responsibility for such interventions
- Roll-out of the Attendr app, which enables electronic monitoring of attendance and engagement with embedded trigger points as per the Attendance and Engagement Policy
- Review of the Personal Tutor role to underpin the consistency of approach of student support
- Digital, numeracy and literacy skills training packages will be developed and delivered to students
- The continuous improvement of our Welcome Week will focus on the review and enhancement of arrangements for Semester 2 entrants
- Enhancement of in-year data available to Schools regarding continuation of students to support evidence-based decision making in regards to effective intervention

PRIORITY 3: COHERENT LEARNING PROVISION

The delivery of high-quality provision that meets the demands of employers and sector bodies is integral to the University's purpose and to its Strategy and our partnership approach is key to this. Our academic provision is planned, delivered and assessed with input from business experts so that skills requirements are met and to ensure that our graduates are in demand by employers upon graduation. Work-based learning and placement opportunities are a key feature of many RGU programmes. All applicable courses are accredited by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) and each of our Schools involves PSRBs and industry representatives in curriculum development, teaching via Visiting Lecturers, examination boards and in the regular internal subject level reviews. These deep and purposeful connections help to ensure that our students benefit from learning that is of direct relevance to the demands of the workplace. RGU graduates are work ready, as demonstrated by the very high performance in the annual Graduate Outcomes Survey (latest data published June 2023)– the University has met its target for **employability and further study** (measure G1) on a consistent basis and its performance in relation to **professional level employment** has seen a 4% rise compared to the previous year (measure G2).

The maintenance and development of partnerships is one of our strategic enablers and this commitment supports the development of coherent learning provision. Examples of this include the engagement with secondary schools and college partners to support successful transition (see Priority 1); the partnerships with PSRBs and industry bodies to deliver appropriate forms of learning and upskilling as described in Priority 4; and the work done directly with businesses to grow their capabilities through the knowledge exchange programme – the University increased the number of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships by 50% in 2022/23 (see UIF for further information).

There is an explicit link between coherency of provision and workbased learning. Graduate Apprenticeships, upskilling, flexible learning programmes and a range of opportunities that we have to support employees 'top up' their qualifications to support evolving employers needs. As we continually respond to the developing requirements of sector bodies our portfolio evolves. We have worked with industry partners and sector bodies to meet the immediate upskilling needs of the region and have a successful track record of credit-bearing Upskilling short course delivery, which is targeted at the development of leadership, commercial and digital skills. We received funding from NESAs and the Scottish Government's Just Transition Fund to deliver [Upskilling for the North-East and Moray areas](#) with a focus on individuals seeking employment options and also organisations wishing to upskill their employees in a wide range of areas relating to the energy transition. The courses include carbon capture, utilisation and storage, energy and transitions management, geothermal energy and applications and hydrogen energy systems.

We also support industry to consider its position in terms of workforce planning and skills development, e.g. via the major reports that have been published by the University and welcomed by the Scottish Government, the North Sea Transition Authority and Offshore Energies UK (OEUK). The latest report, Powering Up The Workforce was published in early September. More information is provided in Priority 6: Net Zero.

We are committed to the provision of innovative, contemporary and flexible learning opportunities through our RGUFlex programme. Our approach to continual enhancement of our course portfolio is based on intelligence that is available from many internal and external sources. This includes intelligence from our industry and employer partners about skills needs, along with the comprehensive labour market information produced by SDS. During 2022/23 we initiated a major portfolio review as part of the wider Future of Teaching, Learning and Assessment project (see Priority 2). The aim of this review was to develop a clear strategy of our key areas for portfolio development in all areas, e.g. energy transition and health (as previously agreed), our international markets, our online / face to face, part time and full time course provision; to not only achieve sustainability into the future but to also to develop undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision to meet skills needs regionally and nationally and to offer compelling, high quality options to potential students that have clear links to employment. The project has used quantitative and qualitative data from internal and external sources to determine a three year portfolio development plan that capitalises on interdisciplinarity for the benefit of students and employers in terms of employability attributes. This project has resulted in a three-year programme of course development, with the first courses recruiting now for September 2024 entry in subjects areas of games/mobile design, criminology and data analytics.

PRIORITY 4: WORKBASED LEARNING AND SKILLS

The University has a longstanding commitment to delivering learning that is tailored to the needs of business. This is part of our core purpose and mission and central to our strategic aims for Teaching, Learning and Student Experience and also for Economic, Social and Cultural Development. This section relates closely to Priority 3 above.

Business Engagement partnerships

RGU's commitment to business engagement is captured in its economic, social and cultural development strategic aim – to support organisations to be more successful. RGU takes a solution focussed approach to working with partners in industry and public sector organisations. This is primarily through its team of Business Development Managers, who are aligned to key sectors. These relationships with industry are not only critical for revenue generation but also inform our provision across teaching, research, consultancy and knowledge exchange. The University also works in partnership with Government, economic development agencies and other institutions to support workforce development in the region. An example of this is the National Energy Skills Accelerator (NESA) which is a partnership between RGU, University of Aberdeen, NESCol, ETZ Ltd and Skills Development Scotland. NESA secured Just Transition Funding to develop energy transition pilot programmes and is also developing an Energy Transition Skills Interactive Pathway funded through the SFC Pathfinder Project. The University's Energy Transition Institute has an international reputation for its work on workforce dynamics for the energy sector and its various published reports are used by Government, industry and other institutions for understanding future skills needs for the energy sector.

Work-based learning and apprenticeships

We were the first Scottish university to agree the Graduate Apprenticeship (GA) model with SDS, with the first delivery in 2017/18. To date, we have collaborated with over 430 companies from across Scotland and recruited over 1000 students onto the GA programme. We have developed our provision to meet the demands of industry and currently offer courses in Engineering, Computing, Business and the Built Environment. The GA students are supported by our student support teams and additional support and networking opportunities are also provided to the mentors, who benefit from a training and support session at the beginning of each semester and readily available contact with course leaders if necessary. Feedback from employers and from sector representatives has led to innovative developments such as offering a flexible study route for the Construction and Built Environment GA. We also work closely with NESCol and other FA providers in the region to identify opportunities for apprentices to progress through the apprenticeship family.

Despite the removal of specific funding, the GA programme remains integral to our recruitment of Scottish domiciled undergraduate entrants and a critical part of our work-based learning portfolio. We are committed to increasing the number of students and the number of subject areas offered as part of the GA programme.

Priority actions for 2023/24:

- Continue to increase the number of Graduate Apprentices studying at RGU and grow the number of participating organisations
- Consult with industry to identify other potential subjects which would benefit from work-based learning

Short-course provision*Upskilling*

The University's portfolio of Upskilling courses has developed at pace and is consistently in high demand. All 28 courses have been created to respond to industry demand and are aligned to our strategic priority sectors of Energy and Health & Social Care and three cross-sectoral themes of Enterprise, Digital and Data and Sustainability, which in turn align to the priorities in Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation. In the past three years, over 2,100 students have undertaken RGU's Upskilling courses with the majority benefiting from fee-waiver places through the SFC Upskilling Fund, SFC National Transformation Training Fund (NTTF), and the North-East Economic Recovery and Skills Fund (NEERSF). In 2023/24 we will deliver 7 new upskilling courses, mainly energy transition related due to additional funding received from the Just Transition Fund through the National Energy Skills Accelerator (NESA) and we will consider the opportunity to increase the number of fee-paying students given the uncertainty of future funding.

Priority actions for 2023/24

- Develop and deliver 7 new upskilling courses, the majority of which will be energy transition related due to additional funding received from the Just Transition Fund through the National Energy Skills Accelerator (NESA)
- Consider the opportunity to increase the number of fee-paying students given the uncertainty of future funding

Flexible Studies Framework

Over the last year, there has been a major review and redesign of our accredited short course provision (not including Upskilling), which has resulted in the launch of [RGUFlex](#). This delivers on-demand flexible learning so that people can develop their skills, change direction or pursue a passion. The programme can be used by employers also as a flexible educational pathway through undergraduate and taught postgraduate study to allow employees to develop specific skills and knowledge to underpin business needs. Credit from other providers and from prior experience can be transferred to make up credit (up to 50% of an award)

Working with key partners

We have a long and proven track record of developing, maintaining and enhancing purposeful partnerships in pursuit of our Strategy. These partnerships cover the full breadth of the University's business, from research to knowledge exchange and business engagement to the planning, delivery and assessment of our curriculum. Our partners include businesses, regional and national organisations, other universities in Scotland, the UK and beyond, regional councils, secondary schools and colleges.

These partnerships have allowed us to secure our highest ever income for research and the highest ever number of knowledge exchange awards in 2022/23 and to exceed our target for employability and/or further study to reach 97.2%, ranking 3rd in Scotland (excluding specialist institutions) and to record a 4% increase in professional level employment and/or higher study to 76.7%, placing us 3rd in Scotland (national performance measure G1 and G2).

Pathfinder projects

It is now just over a year since the inception of the North-East Pathfinder Regional Delivery Board, a process that is pivotal to enhancing regional pathways between further and higher education. We are involved at Board level and also in all relevant projects. In particular, NESCol and RGU are partners in the pilot project to develop *demand-led, aligned and sustainable learner pathways*. Based on a comprehensive data sharing agreement, sessions have taken place with both parties to deliver insight into school leaver destinations and detailed analysis of September entry patterns into the college. A joint meeting between the College's Heads of Sector and the University's Deans was held to consider future models for new pathways and curriculum development requirements. The Vice Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience leads the joint pilot project on *enhancing and co-ordinating the Region's simulation infrastructure for Health and Social Care education*, which involves 25 stakeholders from across the North-East and Moray.

PRIORITY 5: NET ZERO AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

The University has a strategic enabler that sets out our commitment to playing our role in creating a more sustainable future and one way that we will do this is by reducing our environmental footprint and meeting our Net Zero targets.

Working in collaboration with students and staff, the University aims to reduce emissions from energy, transport and consumables significantly, while factoring recycling and sustainability into all of our future decisions. The strategic approach for the major effort to meet the requirement to move to Net Zero is the responsibility of the Sustainability Group, which covers academic and non-academic areas. Each on-campus building has a mechanism whereby staff and students can discuss local ideas to reduce carbon and take action on these, as well as to raise ideas for university-wide consideration. Energy consumption is tracked monthly against the same point in the previous years.

We have introduced a Key Performance Indicator for carbon reduction (see below), which tracks performance of Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions against benchmark. Work continues to assess the baseline for staff travel (Scope 3 emissions), which has led to a change in contract for booking business travel and the leasing of additional electric cars for staff business use.

We have implemented a policy across the University to be more sustainable across our campus by reducing waste, energy, and water consumption. Operationally, the University has developed a 'fabric first' approach to ensure the energy efficiency and sustainability of all our buildings and campus operations. To date, the University has invested more than £5m to support our carbon reduction initiatives, with significant support from SFC. This investment has enabled improvements in our infrastructure to reduce carbon emissions including the installation of LED lighting across our elements of our estate, installation of solar panels and the new, far more energy-efficient gas boilers and plant in Gray's School of Art and RGU Sport. Further examples of good practice include the installation and operation of a ground source heat pump within the Sir Ian Wood Building. This provides both heating and cooling for a percentage of the total building load thus reducing carbon emissions. Waterless urinals have been installed across campus saving more than 14 Million of water a year and sales of ONE water in our cafeterias, which support the development of water wells in Africa. Our Estates team uses electric grounds equipment where possible and aims to eradicate the use of fossil fuel powered equipment.

Sustainability and the UN Sustainable Development Goals

For the first time, the University entered the THE Sustainability Rankings 2023. Our submission related to the following SDGs; SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing; SD6: Clean Water and Sanitation; SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy; SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth; SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities; and SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals. Very positively, we ranked above average for all participants in all these measures and performed particularly well in SDG 8, where we were ranked in the second highest quartile. It ranked in the 3rd quartile. There is much work to do to consolidate this position but it is very pleasing to see that activities across the whole institution, from research to curriculum content to thought leadership and social impact can be presented to give an holistic account of our commitments and progress in these SDGs.

Our measure of carbon reduction

We measure the proportional reduction in Scope 1 and Scope 2 carbon emissions as defined by The Climate Change (Scotland) Act. The baseline used is 2010/11 and these data are reported as per the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties (PBCCD) report. Our target for the 2023/24 academic year (relating to 2022/23) is to reduce the proportion by 50%. In 2021/22 (reported in 2022/23) we achieved a proportional reduction of **47.6%**.

Wider context of carbon reduction

Alongside the work done to meet the institution's net zero target, the University facilitates the net-zero approach across the breadth of its provision, including embedding sustainability in the curriculum (see RGUPlus, Priority 2); its approach to entrepreneurialism and innovation; its course portfolio of full courses, Upskilling and the Flexible Studies Framework, including portfolio development across all of these areas; research (see Priority 6); industry engagement through knowledge transfer partnerships and consultancy; and thought leadership (see Priority 3 for the major publications of the Energy Transitions Institute).

Priority actions for 2023/24:

One of RGU's key priorities is to reduce the overall environmental footprint through carefully targeted actions, interventions and choices:

- Continued use of 100% green electricity across the campus
- Identify options to decarbonize RGU heat demand
- Identify options for solar power provision
- Review further alternative sources of alternative energy provision.
- Reduce water consumption
- Upgrade the campus building management system
- Install LED lighting in the Riverside Building
- Implementation of the Net-Zero Emissions Construction, Refurbishment and Maintenance Standard

PRIORITY 6: HIGH QUALITY RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Growing the quality and impact our internationally recognised research is a key component of our strategic mission to transform people and communities by addressing real-world challenges. Through our research, we deliver significant social, cultural and economic value, contributing to sustainable growth, improved service provision and increased innovation.

Significant momentum has gathered towards achieving our strategic aim for research and knowledge exchange. A thriving research culture and output is vital to the mission, identity and reputation of the University and it reinforces its contribution to innovation and socio-economic impact whilst informing and enriching our high-quality teaching and learning. Our Research and Knowledge Exchange sub-strategy and its associated investment proposal have secured Board approval. The sub-strategy focusses on 5 key areas of development to achieve the strategic aim; improving the quality and volume of research outputs; strengthening the impact of work and enhance the research environment; grow research and knowledge exchange income; increase the size and diversity of our doctoral research community; and grow the proportion of staff holding PhDs.

The University Research Strategy also emphasises the importance of building on our existing interdisciplinary strengths, to develop a focus and critical mass around 4 interdisciplinary (and interlinked) research themes: **Environment, Energy and Sustainability; Health and Well-being; Living in a Digital World; and Inclusive and Creative Societies**. These themes align closely with the University's 'sector-focused' approach around energy, health and digital, and through these themes we will deepen our contribution to the 'place agenda', ensuring our research is relevant to the economic, social and cultural challenges of localities and undertaken in a spirit of collaboration and co-production with communities and partners.

The four key elements of the strategic research investment are:

- The appointment of 10 post-doctoral researchers (**Chancellor's Fellows**) each being for 5 years and assigned to support high-performing researchers aligned with the University's interdisciplinary research themes, allowing the development of critical mass in strategically important research areas. Following advertisement of these positions in February 2023, we received 130 applicants from across the globe. Nine Fellows have so far been appointed (5F, 4M), with a tenth to be recruited and based at our campus on Orkney to support the comprehensive evaluation of the International Islands Games 2025. These postholders focus entirely on research to develop the Research Strategy of the School that they are based within.
- We identified the need for a larger doctoral student community and have set a target of around 400 students by 2027/8 which would be an increase of 33% on 2021/22 numbers. The strategic research investment, therefore, has provision for 35, three year fully funded **PhD scholarships** to be allocated on a competitive basis.
- To improve the environment in which interdisciplinarity can flourish an **Interdisciplinary Research Catalyst Fund** was established. This will be offered on a competitive basis to support interdisciplinary projects aligned with the University's high-level themes and is designed to secure preliminary data that would provide support for major research grant applications to Research Councils and other major charities.

- To ensure that RGU can sustain improvements related to the impact arising from its research, we created an **Impact Accelerator Fund** to support the development of REF-able impact case studies and other KE related activities. The fund will be used strategically to build the evidence base for case studies by investing in opportunities for research to be presented to key policy and practitioner audiences, creating maximum exposure and engagement with those most likely to use the findings from projects in ways which would demonstrate impact and influence.

RGU achieved its highest ever research and knowledge exchange income in 2022/23, with a 28% growth compared to the previous year.

Effective use of SFC core research grants in AY 2023/24

The Research Excellence Grant (REG) allocation is a critically important enabler to support and underpin research activities within our academic schools. In previous years, REG funding was distributed retrospectively, with proportionality of allocation based on FTE submitted to the preceding REF submission upon which the REG allocation was based. For AY 2023-24, £20,000 will be pre-allocated to the central Research Office to support Researcher Development training programme, available to all academic staff and PGR students. The remainder has been allocated to our eleven academic schools based on returns from the schools, as part of our annual peer review of research process, for FTE headcount of staff with significant responsibility for research that school will be submitting for REF 2028. We believe that this proactive forecasting approach is both more equitable and incentivises increased research activity into the future. The purpose of this allocation is to support the Schools' Research Plans for the year by facilitating the activities associated with applications for external income and dissemination and publication of results including public engagement, conference attendance and impact-related activities. This use of the funding means that it is not straightforward to track impact and capacity back to the source. The case study provides an example of research supported by the REG funds, with its key outputs and outcomes.

Supporting sustainability and future research excellence

At the end of 2022, RGU's Board of Governors approved a £6m, 6-year strategic investment in research as part of the University's new Research Strategy, approved in February 2022 to address RGU's underperformance in the REF 2021 process. Key elements of our Research Strategy are: to improve the quality and volume of our research outputs, strengthen the impact of our work and enhance our research environment; to grow our research and knowledge exchange income and the proportion of staff holding external research and KE grants; to grow our doctoral research community and increase the proportion of staff holding PhDs.

Enabling an excellent research environment and positive cultures

Recognising the vital importance of a strong research culture in delivering our strategic aim, we are continuing to develop; mechanisms for tailored mentoring, training and peer support; built on the programmes for Researcher Development and Supervisor Excellence with the introduction of a programme to build professional development for mid-career researchers; and taken steps to address achievement rates of doctoral students, which have been impacted negatively by the pandemic; validation of the Professional Doctorate programme, with the first students due to start in October 2024. We are delighted that these enhancements have been recognised by our doctoral students, with our internal feedback mechanisms for PhD students giving 97% positivity for overall satisfaction.

As part of RGU's continuing commitment to fostering a positive working environment, we need to collectively ensure that we promote initiatives that support our research culture, which

encompasses the behaviours, values, expectations, attitudes and norms of our whole community. In 2021 we conducted our first Research Culture Survey and will be launching the second survey amongst all staff in November 2023. The survey results will be published internally and there will be an open event in February 2024 when the results will be presented, giving staff and research students an opportunity to discuss them. The Research Culture Survey will be run every two years to track our progress. Results from the survey will be used to inform future RGU policy; target resources more effectively; develop new initiatives; benchmark RGU's research culture against other universities.

We are proud to have become a signatory of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers in October 2023 and we will be a signatory of the Research Integrity Concordat in early November 2023. The requisite Annual Reports will be produced in November 2024.

Priority actions for 2023/24:

Research Portfolio

- Complete recruitment of 10 post-doctoral Chancellor's Fellows aligned with interdisciplinary research themes, the NSC and RGU Orkney.
- Recruitment of PhD students co-funded by Schools and aligned with interdisciplinary themes and strategic initiatives.
- Programme of events organised by interdisciplinary theme champions.

Research Intensity and Inclusivity

- Use the new annual peer review of research process to ensure that the University is on track to achieve the medium-term outcome.

Research Productivity

- Ensure that the 20% research allocation is adhered to along with research plan.

Research Quality

- Use the new annual peer review of research process to assess progress toward this outcome.

Research Environment

- Ensure delivery of the Early Career Researcher Development programme and that mentoring is in place for Early Career Researchers in each School.
- Continue to deliver a hybrid Mid-Career Researcher Development Programme.
- Building on the initial Research Culture survey with research staff in 2021, implement a biennial Research Culture Survey for all staff to provide a baseline and action list in support of the REF narrative submission in 2027/28.

UNIVERSITY INNOVATION FUND 2023/24

Introduction

Throughout 2022/23, RGU collaborated with other universities to consider approaches to exploiting research, skills and innovation, to aid Scotland's economic and social development, particularly influencing and aligning with Scotland's Innovation Strategy and the Entrepreneurial Campus Blueprint. This active engagement will increase in 2023/24.

Given our location, RGU is acutely aware of the need for business, society and the University to transition in response to the climate emergency and will incorporate this in UIF outcome priorities in 2023/24, as it did in 2022/23.

RGU has leveraged its UIF and Just Transition Fund funds, partnered purposefully and allocated its own resources to deliver on its 2022/23 UIF plan, as demonstrated below. The University Board and Executive have stated their commitment to accelerating and widening impact through further investment, including matching of the UIF platform grant in 2023/24.

Outcome 1 (Demand Stimulation)

Working with Enterprise Agencies, Scottish Government and Business Networks, Interface and others helping increase the demand and quality of engagement for business and the public sector for university services.

In 22/23, RGU further increased its regional and national engagement, working with Government, councils, enterprise agencies, Opportunity North East, Interface and other key organisations to maximise opportunities for business and public organisations.

Key priorities 22/23 and results were:

1. Contribute to a just and fair transition by working in partnership – North East Economic Recovery and Skills Fund projects successfully completed; Energy Transition Skills Interactive Pathway tool being developed through the National Energy Skills Alliance (NESA); Just Transition Funding secured for a Digital Innovation Lab to help decarbonise the construction sector and create green jobs, and for a NESA energy transition skills programme with University of Aberdeen and North East Scotland College.
2. Maximise opportunities from RGU's Energy Transition expertise and inform future Government, regional and University developments – RGU's 'Making the Switch' report widely shared with industry, companies, agencies, regulators and governments across the UK; new, sector leading supply chain and workforce visibility tool developed to enable rapid analysis of policy decisions and investment choices on the offshore energy supply chain and the offshore energy workforce in the UK, now being used to inform decision makers.
3. Secure 40 knowledge exchange awards – 59 knowledge exchange awards secured at a value of £3.36m, reflecting a significant contribution RGU makes to supporting organisations to succeed.

Key priorities 23/24 will be:

1. Continue to maximise opportunities from RGU's Energy Transition Institute expertise and inform future Government, regional and University developments, including assessing the future of the UK offshore energy workforce and the national requirement for investment, policy, innovation and skills.
2. Secure 50 knowledge exchange awards and work with Interface, Innovation Centres, Innovate UK and others to promote and deliver KE to support economic recovery and further develop the RGU pipeline of organisations engaged in terms of number, depth and visibility.
3. Develop the Digital Innovation Lab to support the decarbonisation of the construction sector and work in partnership with local partners such as Councils, Energy Transition Zone Ltd, Port of Aberdeen and with BE-ST to maximise regional and national impact. Deliver a business growth plan for the Digital Innovation Lab, scaling the project and addressing new sectors.

4. Maximise opportunities from, and contribute to, the Aberdeen Investment Zone, with plan to be delivered by February 2024.

Outcome 2 (Simplification/Commercialisation)

In partnership with Enterprise Agencies and Interface and others demonstrably simplify business access to knowledge and expertise in Scottish universities.

RGU simplifies access to knowledge and expertise by aligning with key government initiatives and mechanisms and by conducting business directly with industry, informed by feedback from the sector.

Key priorities 22/23 and results were:

1. Prepare University sub strategy for economic, social and cultural development with identified process for organisations to access services – economic and community engagement significantly increased as part of University Strategy and Associate Deans for Economic and Community Engagement created and individuals appointed for each School.
2. Further develop the business section of the RGU website and increase social media engagement – working with a digital agency to develop new brand identity and web presence; social media significantly increased through appointment of dedicated marketing officer for economic development including entrepreneurship and business engagement.
3. Roll out commercialisation resources and processes across the University to increase engagement and number and size of projects undertaken – UKRI funds used to promote and increase access to KTP across the University and decision taken to appoint Associate Deans in every School as best mechanism to increase activity and effectiveness and improve access to services.
4. Continue a sectoral-based approach to business development, underpinned by RGU's industry-informed sectoral plans – projects successfully delivered through NEERSF in energy and health sectors; upskilling programmes delivered to selected sectors; and working closely with Energy Transition Institute to increase understanding of sector developments.

Key Priorities 23/24 will be:

1. Roll out commercialisation resources and processes throughout the University working with Associate Deans and deliver an Associate Dean Development Programme focussed around commercialisation to increase engagement and depth and breadth of projects.
2. Participate in Islands Deal to increase access to entrepreneurship development across the island community, working with other partners including University of the Highlands and Islands and Heriot Watt University.
3. Continue to host Interface and North of Scotland KTP Office at the University and use this to further build relationships with business and with other HEIs. Actively engage with the UIF Collaboration Manager and with RCDG and its Enterprise Support sub-group, to share best practice/insights and contribute to collaborative developments in relation to the Entrepreneurial Campus Blueprint, SFC review plans and KEIF. The University will also continue to support Converge, including through the hosting of a Regional Enterprise Evening at RGU in October 2023, attended by Universities from the North East and East of Scotland.

Outcome 3 (Simplification/Greater Innovation)

In partnership with Enterprise Agencies and Interface at a national level make use of their sectoral knowledge to promote greater innovation in the economy (including beyond non-STEM)

RGU continues to deliver to the national agenda through participation in collaborative regional initiatives in areas such as energy transition, entrepreneurship, and health.

Key 22/23 priorities and results were:

1. Build on RGU sectoral plans to align with national economic priorities including Innovation Strategy and Entrepreneurial Campus – actively participated in, and influenced outputs for, national discussions and aligned own work accordingly.
2. Consider opportunities for innovation through the Just Transition Fund to address low carbon mission challenges such as the decarbonisation of construction – Just Transition Funds secured to create a Digital

Innovation Lab to help decarbonise the construction sector through building retrofit, modelling and visualisation.

3. Working in partnership, contribute to NESAs and the Energy Regional Pathfinder and provide an innovative approach to delivery of critical skills development to companies and individuals seeking to transition skills to renewable energies – funds secured (NESAs JTF £1m and NESAs Energy Regional Pathfinder £66k) and projects underway.
4. Working in partnership, deliver health and social care NEERSF elements and Health Regional Pathfinder, to ensure a fair, shared and innovative approach to service provision – successful completion of NEERSF projects (recognised by nomination for Herald Education Awards); approach being shared regionally and nationally and model recognised in the recent Scottish Government AHP Education and Workforce Review; RGU invited to present experience at Health and Social Care Workforce Scotland Conference, October 2023.

Key Priorities 23/24 will be:

1. Build on regional and national collaborations to maximise RGU's contribution to stimulate greater innovation in the economy through effective contribution to Investment Zone; delivery of Digital Innovation Lab activities and Business Plan; delivery of NESAs JTF and Pathfinder activities and plan for future; and strong alignment with Innovation Strategy, particularly where there are sectoral strengths.
2. Ensure effective engagement in new Regional Economic Strategy and Plan, leading in key relevant areas.
3. Recruit an Economic Development Manager to ensure RGU can resource and provide best support to collaborative regional initiatives and promote greater innovation in the economy.

Outcome 4 (Entrepreneurialism)

Sector will have made significant positive change in the way entrepreneurial opportunities are promoted and delivered to students, staff and businesses

RGU will continue to provide a leading national voice on entrepreneurship, will use entrepreneurialism and innovation externally and with staff to help stimulate economic development and will further enhance the student experience and graduate attributes through entrepreneurship as part of RGU+.

Key 2022/23 priorities and results were:

1. Embed entrepreneurship in the curriculum for RGU students – RGU+ launched with sustainability and entrepreneurship to be embedded within the curriculum during 2023/24; toolkit of resources to enable Schools to build confidence and deliver entrepreneurship training themselves; extra-curricular activity included an UNSDG Student Ideas Competition, Enterprise Skills sessions, Innovation Masterclasses, an online Entrepreneurship toolkit and the annual Start-up accelerator programme.
2. Build the relationship with Techscaler and the development of an Industry Driven Entrepreneurship programme for the region in collaboration with ONE - working alongside regional partners, seven staff members from RGU visited MIT to participate in its Entrepreneurial Development Programme and learn from international best practice in entrepreneurial training; Vice Principal Economic Development and Head of Entrepreneurship & Innovation playing a key role in bringing the MIT Venture Mentor Scheme to the region to support growth companies.
3. Contribute to national entrepreneurial campus discussions and lead on entrepreneurship developments within the Islands Deal TalEntEd programme - RGU contributed to the consultation on both the Government's Entrepreneurial Campus strategy and Innovation Strategy; participated in the RCDF Enterprise sub-group and hosted Ross Tuffee at RGU; continued to lead the entrepreneurship initiatives within the 10-year Islands Deal TalEntEd programme, the Full Business Case for which is in its final phase and the programme is expected to commence in Q1 2024.
4. Gain recognition for RGU in regard to its approach to entrepreneurship – RGU awarded Outstanding Business Engagement in Universities at Herald Higher Education Awards 2023 for Women in Business enterprise programme; RGU's approach recognised by Mark Logan, Scotland's inaugural Chief Entrepreneur, during a video address at the RGU Start Up Accelerator Showcase 2023 "...the Programme has put RGU at the forefront of universities in Scotland for entrepreneurship, and not just in the UK but on a European scale too, making an enormous difference to our future society".

Key Priorities 23/24 will be:

1. Continue to stimulate and foster an entrepreneurial culture and embed an entrepreneurial mindset across the curriculum, as part of the new RGU+ framework and in full alignment with Theme 4 of the Entrepreneurial Campus Blueprint. Roll out the RGU Innovation Award across all academic schools and grow the number of students receiving the award through a 'train the trainer' programme and by increasing the number of accredited modules. RGU is utilising its UIF uplift to appoint a new staff member on a fixed term basis to support this activity.
2. Continue to position RGU as a leader in entrepreneurship education, practice and activity and support graduate employability through the development and delivery of entrepreneurship programmes; and work with key eco-system partners to meet the needs of the region and country. This includes delivery of an RGU Accelerator programme in 2023/24 which is open to RGU students, staff and alumni and North East Scotland College students and leading submission of a collaborative bid with partner universities to the Pathways pre-start fund.
3. Finalise the TalEntEd Islands Deal activity with the aim of commencing delivery in Q1 2024 with the purpose of accelerating entrepreneurship to drive economic and social prosperity.
4. Support RGU staff by delivering workshops for Associate Deans (both Economic and Community Engagement and Research), and Early Career Researchers; and launch an IP commercialisation programme for research active staff and entrepreneurial academics. In addition, RGU will utilise its UIF uplift to support an RGU Associate Dean, Economic and Community Development, who is also a start-up founder, to attend the MIT Entrepreneurship Development Programme in Boston in January 2024, aligning with Themes 1 and 7 of the Entrepreneurial Campus Blueprint.

Outcome 5 (International)

In partnership with SDI, Connected Scotland and others pool knowledge and networks and shared good practice to promote and engage Scotland internationally

In 22/23, RGU took advantage of being able to travel again, developing new and growing existing relationships, while planning on how to reduce its future carbon footprint.

Key 22/23 priorities and results were:

1. Develop new international models of engagement for University services – new models in development although importance of face to face contact, building relationships, again became a priority.
2. Re-establish and grow relationships in 2 key existing markets and build 1 new market, working with national bodies and through enhanced engagement with alumni – two development programmes secured with Japanese partners for delivery in September 2023 and significant increase in IIT Sri Lanka student numbers despite geoeconomic challenges; new market opportunity developed in Guyana with 29 students starting online degrees.
3. Scale up and replicate online model for engagement, reducing carbon footprint and costs – online model for engagement being revised as priority given to in person engagement.

Key Priorities 23/24 will be:

1. Increase participation with existing partners and in three known markets; and secure opportunities with two new partners.
2. Increase participation in international familiarisation and promotional programmes through SDI, DBT, University Alliance and other partners.
3. Significantly increase international engagement through the development of a Globalisation Committee, a joint approach with RGU's partner Navitas and through a series of staff development activities.

Outcome 6 (Inclusive Growth and Social Impact)

Scale up support of the Scottish Government's ambitions for inclusive growth

In 22/23, RGU increased its support of economic and community development, addressing the relationships between health, wellbeing, social resilience, culture and prosperity.

Key 22/23 priorities and results were:

1. Develop support for the Torry community through a Law Clinic based in the local medical centre offering free legal advice to residents – Law Clinic established and extended to include digital law clinic for remote and rural populations in Orkney Islands.
2. Strengthen relationships with RGU's neighbouring community in Garthdee through a range of activities - physiotherapy students involved in multiple community activities and classes; social science students undertaking placements in the Inchgarth Community centre.
3. Working with Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeen Inspired to shape and develop the vision for the regeneration of the city centre – RGU joined new Aberdeen Education Liaison Group (led by ACC Leader); Design City Studio work by architectural student featured in local press and showcased in the city Art Gallery; and engagement in "Our Union Street" discussions.

Key Priorities 23/24 will be:

1. Extend digital law clinic for prisoners in HMP Grampian and continue to develop the digital law clinic for Orkney, supporting remote and rural communities and disadvantaged populations where access to legal services can be prohibitive.
2. Deliver community on-campus events, co-designed with the local community – inviting the public to engage and to inform future developments.
3. Through staff and students, input to the vision for the Aberdeen North Harbour and collaborate with Aberdeen City Council on city centre regeneration projects.

Outcome 7 (Equality and Diversity)

Ensure positive promotion of equality and diversity in staff and all who are affected by the use of UIF

The University is committed to building an inclusive environment and to promoting the importance of equality and diversity through actions.

Key 22/23 priorities and results were:

1. Develop RGU's application for the various national equality charter marks – Steering Group created, chaired by the Vice Principal (Corporate Services) and Institutional Equality Lead, to submit to Athena Swan in 2023/24 and start developments towards the Race Equality Charter.
2. Fill all remaining Equality Champion positions and provide the group with the support to promote equality, diversity and inclusion effectively and positively to all staff – Eleven equality champions appointed, supported by the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Adviser as well as Equality Action Groups.

Key Priorities 23/24 will be:

1. Continue to work towards national equality charters by embedding Athena Swan priorities and submitting to the Race Equality Charter.
2. Continue to embed and mainstream equality and diversity by improving staff and student engagements through equality action groups, networks, champions, and active community activities.

Outcome Agreement Case Studies

Student Outcomes 1: Extending our reach through widening access

Widening access to our courses by inspiring, supporting and enabling learners to engage in higher education is a key factor in combating social inequalities and delivering better employment outcomes, particularly in low-deprivation areas within the region.

Through our sector leading partnership with North East Scotland College (NESCol), an articulation pathway carved a successful journey to a degree education for Morgan Davidson who enrolled in University in third year after completing an HND at NESCol. Having grown up in a deprived area and a low-income family, Morgan describes her astonishment, disbelief and pride at being awarded a 2.1 (Hons) Degree in Law.

Morgan said: “The traditional way of going to University was to obtain grades at secondary school. The route I followed was a relatively fresh concept to me in that you could leave secondary and complete a two-year HND at college, allowing you to gain access to a degree in third year. This was an absolute game-changer.

“Some might think that by not having suitable grades for University when you leave school, you’re a bit of a failure and that it would be difficult to achieve and progress. Now, those attitudes have completely changed.

“I believe my HND was a great stepping stone to support my personal and academic growth. It’s increased my wealth of knowledge, understanding, skills and personality traits, but at my own pace.

“It has been small steps at a time, but that’s exactly what I needed, even if I didn’t know it at the time. My unintentional study path has allowed me to achieve and become the person I am today.”

Upon completing her degree, she hopes to apply for her diploma at RGU, and once she’s achieved this, she wants to pursue a career as a lawyer. She is currently working at Pinsent Masons Law Firm in Aberdeen to support herself through her studies and to continue progressing her learning and understanding in a professional legal environment.

Student Outcomes 2: Overcoming difficulties to master a first A

MSc Advancing Practice student Laura Adam was only diagnosed with dyslexia and dysgraphia at 47 years-old after reaching out to the Inclusion Centre at RGU, which allowed her to access adequate academic support, leading her to obtain her first A not long after.

Laura obtained a diploma to become a qualified nurse in 1996 despite struggling with reading and writing at school, where she received little to no support. After years of experience working as a nurse, she had to make a career change due to a physical condition. However, she was refused interviews because she lacked a degree in nursing, which pushed her to join RGU to upskill.

Adapting to university and academic writing in particular was difficult for Laura, who failed one of her modules. She felt frustrated because she knew she was capable of doing the job but thought she couldn't keep up with what was asked of her at this academic level, which was stalling her career progression. That's when she decided to contact the Inclusion Centre.

The team at the Inclusion Centre supported Laura to get some tests done to determine if she had any learning difficulties. She scheduled an appointment with one of the University's Educational Psychologists and was diagnosed with dyslexia and dysgraphia. The results gave her a sense of relief as she realised that others had made her feel unintelligent when her brain was actually just working differently.

After getting diagnosed, the Inclusion Centre helped her get funding with SAAS to put arrangements in place to support her studies. She was given access to a computer with programmes that could help her academically, provided proofreading support, and allocated extra time during exams. What she found most helpful was the support from the University's Study Skills team who particularly helped her in understanding what was expected of her for her final exam.

As a result, she passed all of her modules and obtained her first ever A for one of her essays, a significant achievement for someone who had previously been struggling at school.

Sharing her delighted following these outstanding results, Laura says: "I never thought I would achieve something like that, let alone on a master's degree course. And when I read that essay back, I can't believe I actually wrote that."

Social renewal 1: The power of sport in transforming lives

With a desire to reduce crime while promoting health and wellbeing through the power of sport, Streetsport was launched in partnership between RGU and the local police and fire services. It initially deployed mobile sport arenas in areas of Aberdeen that were identified by key stakeholders as where young people needed supported most.

The programme has a large team of volunteers with a fleet of vehicles and sports kit and equipment, and it operates at two Cruyff Courts, school premises and astro turf pitches.

Participation at Streetsport grew year-on-year, peaking at 16,525 in 2019 where 539 sessions were delivered - an average of 13 every week. 2022 amassed 15,500+ participations with 399 sessions delivered, returning to pre-lockdown trends. Streetsport has also significantly improved its gender split from around 80/20 male in 2015 to almost 60/40 in 2020 through an emphasis on inclusivity and female role models.

There is currently a bank of 50+ volunteers whose time equates to over 2,200 annual hours and Streetsport's been awarded both the Queens Award for Voluntary Service and the Volunteer Friendly award.

Research has shown that Streetsport's regular presence has reduced anti-social youth crime; delivered positive destinations for both volunteers and participants; and provided an environment where young people feel more healthy, active, nurtured, achieving, respected and responsible than at both home and school. Last year local police reported that in one particular area where Streetsport operated in, youth annoyance calls had reduced to "almost zero" and the work delivered was "second to none". Since 2019, police statistics show that Streetsport operations in one Cruyff Court area had reduced youth anti-social behaviour by 50%.

In the past year Streetsport has supported the City Council in helping to integrate refugees, delivering sessions for both Afghan and Ukrainian resettled youngsters. Through its membership of global network Common Goal, supported by Adidas, Streetsport has also been able to offer sports kit and clothes to hundreds of youngsters.

Economic Transformation 1: Women in Business

The Women in Business programme directly correlates with RGU's strategic purpose of being innovative and inclusive to create a prosperous future for all by contributing to social, cultural and economic development regionally, nationally and internationally.

RGU's Entrepreneurship and Innovation Group (EIG) worked closely with Aberdeenshire Council to identify groups that would benefit from entrepreneurial and business support, with women in the region identified as priority.

The seven-week online programme deliberately brings motherhood to the fore, frequently encouraging mothers to feel comfortable having their children involved in meetings or tending to them when needed.

Programme funding was secured through the Scottish Government's Parental Employability Support Fund (PESF) administered through Aberdeenshire Council, enabling RGU to focus its support on mothers or women with caring responsibilities. This has so far consisted of £14,000 per cohort, £70,000 in total having successfully completed five cohorts. Two further cohorts are due to be delivered during 2023 at an additional £14,000 each.

Across all cohorts of Women in Business there has so far been 60 participating women, all of whom are mothers, and all of whom have received full funding support through PESF. There are two further cohorts confirmed for 2023 with another two standalone workshops planned thereafter into 2024.

One participant, who launched her own ethical clothing business, said the course "approaches entrepreneurship from a different perspective, taking on board the unique challenges faced by mums", citing the importance of belief, confidence, and inspiration, while hailing the "amazing level of support".

There was further recognition for Women in Business when it won the Outstanding Business Engagement in Universities category at the Herald Higher Education Awards in June 2023. After accepting the award, Candace Elson, Innovation Manager (Regional) at RGU who leads the programme, paid tribute to the women entrepreneurs who have taken part and said it was "a testament to the passionate and committed women who have followed their entrepreneurial spirit."

Research: Deploying REG funding to improve online safety for young people

The Research Excellence Grant plays a vital role as an enabler, underpinning RGU's underlying principles for excellent research. Through direct investment of £79k of RGU's REG allocation, the School of Creative and Cultural Business, is able to underpin a supportive research environment and leverage investment from a range of research funding sources, including the Digital Xtra Fund and the Scottish Government, that allows creative research projects such as [Maddie is Online](https://maddiesonline.blogspot.com/) <https://maddiesonline.blogspot.com/> to be nurtured and developed.

[Maddie is Online](https://maddiesonline.blogspot.com/) is an innovative and impactful educational project that uses creative storytelling to produce learning and teaching material for everyone involved in children's education, support and safeguarding (aged 9-13 years old). It focuses on the development of young people's online information, digital and media literacy skills through digital cartoon animated stories, drawing attention to critical issues of online connectivity, in a way that is fun and engaging, linking to children's and young peoples' own online experiences within everyday life.

The educational material has been developed with the creative input of more than 50 people (young people, librarians, academics, university students and the general public) and focuses on the digital citizenship skills that young people need to navigate safely, effectively and ethically their online environment. At the centre of the project is co-creation, opening dialogue and building resilient and healthy digital communities of young people.

The animation videos are available on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/) and include different cartoon characters that have voice-over functionality, step-by-step scripts, scenes and expressions. [Maddie is Online online shelf](#) also offers openly accessible digital toolkits for educators that accompany the videos. Currently there are four available series:

1. Online Resilience – worked with 269 pupils in S1 classes within secondary schools in Scotland, via workshops on online resilience which empowered young people to open a dialogue about challenging situations they experience in their everyday online connectivity.
2. Misinformation - engaged 87 young people in Ellon Academy (S1 classes), all S2 classes in Woodfarm High School (Glasgow) and 90 primary school children in Anatolia College in Greece (10 years old).
3. Copyright
4. The Ethics of Online Safety and Security (which follows the Scottish Government Ethical Digital Nation strategy)- engaged 8 teachers and 49 pupils (12 and 13-year-olds) who produced stories and animations.

[Maddie is Online](https://maddiesonline.blogspot.com/) also offered 6 online safety and security workshops and 2 career talks on online gaming and ethical hacking with total engagement of 502 participants from the U.K., Ireland, Greece, New Zealand, Brazil, USA, Canada, India and Africa. Participants included schoolteachers, librarians, academic, parents and individuals from organisations such as the School Library Association, Scotland Police, Amnesty.org., the Scottish Council for Development and Industry, Westminster, and the European Central Bank.

[Maddie is Online](https://maddiesonline.blogspot.com/) was presented on [BBC 'Sunday morning Live Show'](#) and Original FM and in major newspapers, such as [The Scotsman](#) and [Press & Journal](#). The educational resources have been selected by the EU project <https://bridgeinfoliteracy.eu/> as part of an open access portal with best practices to promote information and digital literacy in primary education in the EU. The work has been shared widely on different blogs, including on GLOW [Maddie is Online – digital citizenship cartoon series – MDLT Blog \(glowscotland.org.uk\)](#), [Daily Safeguarding News - Safer Schools \(oursaferschools.co.uk\)](#) and the [CILIP Information Literacy Group](#). The work has also reached other European countries and it is showcased by school libraries in [Portugal](#), the University of Limerick under the topic of [safety](#) and by the government in [Luxemburg](#).

[Maddie is Online](https://maddiesonline.blogspot.com/) was invited to participate at 'Thriving in a Digital World' - a British-Irish Council Symposium hosted by the Scottish Government in Edinburgh on 25 April 2023 (150 participants) and a paper will also be presented at [The European Conference on Information Literacy](#) (ECIL) in October 2023 (400 delegates) in Krakow, Poland.

[Maddie is Online](https://maddiesonline.blogspot.com/) was funded by the Scottish Government (and supported by Digital Xtra Fund), the [Scottish Library and Information Council](#), and the [Robert Gordon Innovation Accelerator](#). The value of the [Maddie is Online](https://maddiesonline.blogspot.com/) series lies with the flexibility and online accessibility of the resources that engage children in critical dialogue and activities. Young people are also co-creators of context which means that they directly engage with the themes, develop knowledge and exercise their creativity.

Outcome Agreement between Robert Gordon University and the Scottish Funding Council for AY 2023-24

On behalf of Robert Gordon University

Signed:



Print name: Professor Steve Olivier

Position: Principal and Vice-Chancellor

Date:

2023/11/21

Signed:



Print name: Dr Colin Hunter

Position: Chair

Date:

On behalf of the Scottish Funding Council:

Signed:



Print name: Karen Watt

Position: Chief Executive

Date:

15 January 2024