



Interim Outcome Agreement

2020 - 21

Introduction



Our strategy is based on our mission to transform people and communities by providing demand-led teaching and research to contribute to economic, social, and cultural development regionally, nationally, and internationally. We support the regional and national public and private sectors through the provision of highly skilled graduates, a range of research services and activities to facilitate economic development.

There is a natural alignment between our mission and strategic aims, the Outcome Agreement priorities and the Scottish Government's national performance framework. This is demonstrated by:

- **Graduate employability**

We maintained our position as top in Scotland for graduate employability in the new Graduate Outcomes Survey. This record is supplemented by the outcome of the most recent LEO data in which our performance places us top in Scotland.

- **Student experience**

We achieved the highest performance above benchmark for overall satisfaction in Scotland and came second in the UK, excluding small, specialist and private providers, in the National Student Survey 2020. We successfully transformed the curriculum with minimum disruption to allow first online learning and then blended learning with a focus on recognising student support needs. The impact on the student experience is evidenced by the positive feedback documented in our internal Semester one student experience questionnaire. We also mitigated

impacts from digital poverty with the support of funding from SFC.

- **Student mental health and wellbeing**

We rapidly moved all support services online, including services provided by the Students' Association, to ensure that students could access vital support throughout lockdown and beyond. This move allowed more flexibility in availability, including evening appointments and has been supplemented by SFC's investment in additional counselling time. In recognition of the clear link between physical and mental wellbeing, students were also given free access to RGU:Sport in semester one.

- **Fairer access**

Our long tradition of widening access to higher education is evidenced in our success in recruiting SIMD20 (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) students in Scotland, securing the top eight position despite the very small number of MD20 postcode areas regionally. 2020/21 saw the highest level of MD20 recruitment and entrants from SHEP schools since this measure was introduced.

- **Workforce development**

We remain a sector-leading provider of Graduate Apprenticeships, with high levels of recruitment continuing into 2020/21. In addition, all places in the SFC funded Upskilling programme were filled in 2019 and demand is very high for 2020/21. We also developed new courses through close engagement with regional partners and BSc (Hons) Paramedic Practice will start this year.



- **Research**

We are actively engaged in the economic renewal and diversification of the region through the development of the National Subsea Centre, which aligns our existing research excellence to the key challenges within the region.

- **Supporting the Scottish economy**

We secured the largest number of Innovation Vouchers in Scotland in 2019/20 and exceeded our target for Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP). We have continued to work closely with businesses to deliver KTPs and Innovation Vouchers to address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic on business.

- **Partnerships**

We have renewed and strengthened our sector-leading partnership with North East Scotland College (NESCo) which enables one of Scotland's largest cohorts of articulating students to enrol with advanced

standing each year in the university. In addition, we are active in building relationships with other Scottish colleges to ensure that our students have access to advanced articulation into our high-performing curriculum.

Our recent award of Scottish University of the Year (The Times & Sunday Times Good University Guide 2021) and other significant accolades such as Business School of the Year (Times Higher Education Awards 2020) is testament to our success in these activities.

Woven throughout this interim Outcome Agreement (and in particular the final section) is evidence of our response to the devastating impact of the pandemic. We have harnessed our knowledge and expertise, strengths in collaboration and dedicated our combined efforts to make a real and lasting contribution across health and social care, workforce development and economic recovery.

Section 1
Outcomes
for students →



Fair access and transitions

We have a long-standing commitment to access, which is demonstrated through pioneering work with the Further Education sector. Our approach is firmly rooted in delivering credible, high quality, interventions which work by inspiring, supporting and enabling people and their families to be confident, and to engage in, higher education. This approach is expressed in our Access Aims as follows:

- Build ambition: raise aspirations and develop ambition;
- Enable access: mitigate barriers and create student-centred access pathways; and

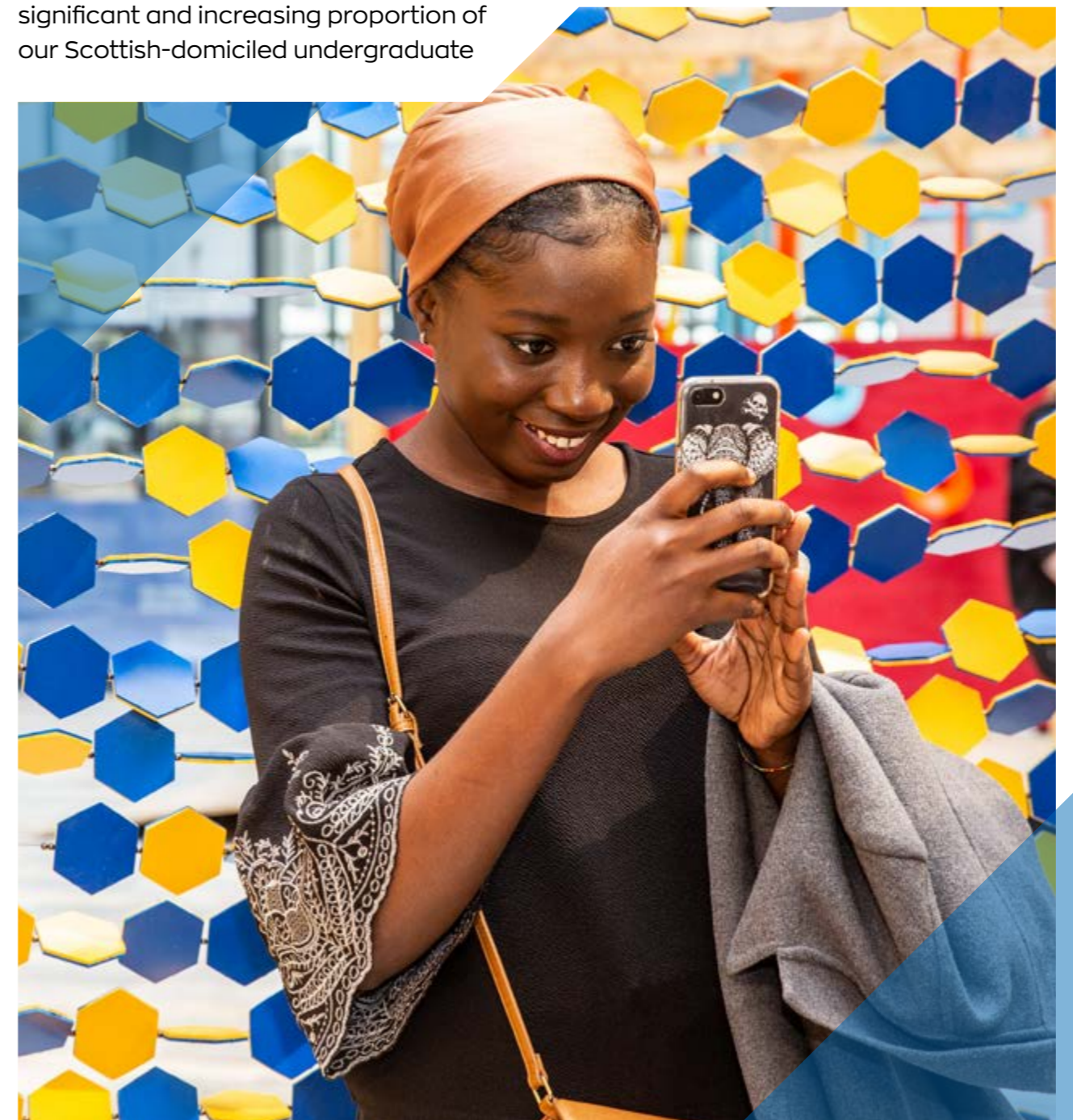
- Support achievement: support the development of skills-enriched graduates with the confidence and capacity to achieve their ambitions, whatever their circumstances.

Year on year, we have enhanced and refined our outreach activity to MD20

**IN 2020/21,
WE RECRUITED OUR
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THIS TARGET WAS
FIRST INTRODUCED.**

students and annually recruit over 100 such students, significantly more than some other universities that have reached a 10% participation target. In 2020/21, we recruited our highest number of MD20 students since this target was first introduced, demonstrating the growing success of our approach to supporting this under-represented group. Our commitment to widening access is not focussed solely on socio-economic deprivation, and as in previous years a significant and increasing proportion of our Scottish-domiciled undergraduate

entrants are disabled or come from the BME communities. Our work with Aberdeenshire Council to develop an enterprise and innovation programme for 16 to 24-year olds as part of the Young Persons' Guarantee (see **Innovation** for further information) is another example of the range of our work in terms of supporting individuals in the widest sense.





Our sector-leading partnership with NESCOL enables one of Scotland’s largest cohorts of articulating students to enrol with advanced standing each year in the University. This partnership has individual course level agreements with the vast majority of our provision, enabling over 400 students annually to articulate with advanced standing from their HN directly into the second or third year of their degree as appropriate.

People from deprived areas are supported to have fair access

We have a strong track record of attracting and supporting students from deprived and disadvantaged backgrounds. We take a proactive approach to building awareness and aspirations for learners who are furthest from the higher education system, formalising access pathways and

providing support for these learners when they have achieved a place at the University.

The number and proportion of MD20 students who have enrolled at the University in 2020/21 has increased, an encouraging sign that the significant activity undertaken in 2019/20 to promote our offer is beginning to see success. Access thresholds have been implemented across the full range of undergraduate provision for applicants from MD20 and MD40 areas, those who are care experienced, and those who are at or have attended a SHEP school. These thresholds are promoted on our webpages and prospectus, through targeted communications and to all schools and colleges with which we have links. Further activities to enhance MD20 recruitment include communication of clear messages to prospective

applicants, their carers, and schools regarding the package of support available and targeted conversion calling and communications to applicants. The CoWA target of 10% remains challenging for us as recruitment out-with the immediate region is already high. Support provided to enable students from deprived areas to have fair access includes financial support to attend applicant days, access to targeted scholarships, the provision of welcome packs which include items such as a laptop, grocery vouchers, book vouchers and stationery. All MD20 students are additionally offered a year of free accommodation in University managed halls to enable an easier transition to higher education.

People with experience of care are supported to have fair access

We have continued our strong record of providing access for care-experienced learners, with the fourth highest number of care-experienced students enrolled in Scotland. These students are eligible for consideration under our access thresholds as well as the full range of pre- and post-enrolment support which is available to MD20 students. In addition, we widely promote the availability of the care-experienced bursary. Care-experienced students are eligible for full-time, annual (52 week) accommodation with a 20% discount in the first year of study to provide additional stability. Each enquirer or applicant who declares they are care experienced is contacted by the Widening Access Team to form the applicant’s link with us pre-enrolment and, along with the Personal Tutor, will remain a dedicated contact for the duration of study. In line with CELCIS

recommendations, we also provide advice about study break options, should they be needed. The retention record for care-experienced students has remained above both our target and overall average for the past three years and is a testament to the support provided by support and academic staff. Our commitment to supporting care-experienced students is outlined in full within our **Corporate Parenting Plan**.

Prior learning is considered in the student’s journey

Articulation pathways are central to the Scottish education sector’s contribution to the Scottish Government’s inclusion agenda. We have a longstanding history of high performance in this area as a result of a strategic commitment to widening access to courses and continuous development and enhancement of partnerships with colleges. Our College Engagement Strategy is focused on extending articulation opportunities both at the regional and national level and as a result, we have doubled the number of course level agreements in place in 2020/21 compared to 2019/20, which

OUR SECTOR-LEADING PARTNERSHIP WITH NESCOL ENABLES ONE OF SCOTLAND’S LARGEST COHORTS OF ARTICULATING STUDENTS TO ENROL WITH ADVANCED STANDING EACH YEAR IN THE UNIVERSITY.

represents an increase in articulation routes from 72 to 104.

We have a close and long-established relationship with NEScol, detailed further in the later **Collaboration** section, and continue to further enhance relationships with other colleges nationally. We have signed a Letter of Agreement for additional funded places across a range of computing and management courses with Dundee and Angus College. Both institutions continue to seek opportunities for extending articulation where there is demand. In addition, we recently signed a Memorandum of Agreement with Fife College and Glasgow Clyde College, formalising articulation arrangements for a range of subject areas and are seeking to extend articulation links with other colleges aligned with our strategy. An agreement has also been signed with UHI and Moray College to facilitate articulation into our undergraduate nursing routes, in recognition of the fact that the geographical area covered by NHS Grampian includes Moray.

The number of college HN entrants has declined year on year, and as a result the overall number of advanced entry students to University has consequently declined. In response we have capitalised on our significant experience of articulation and widening access to grow other partnerships and widen access to more people across Scotland.

Building on significant experience in articulation from engagement with colleges, we further recognise prior experiential learning through the Graduate Apprenticeship Programme. These fully funded, structured degree

programmes offer applicants the opportunity to enter the University with advanced standing, where appropriate, while continuing in employment.

Transitions and pathways for students are supported and signposted

In recognition of the potential for increased anxieties and challenges around the transition to higher education in 2020/21, we redesigned and restructured the Student Welcome to be delivered wholly online. This allowed us to provide new and returning students a safe welcome experience, minimise anxiety and establish a strong connection with our students with over 100 virtual events. The delivery of this refreshed welcome in 2020/21 builds on our established experience of providing accessible transitions and pathways to learning.

Our Degree Link programme allows students to have the best of both worlds, to study first at college, and then to complete a degree without any time loss. Information about pathways to the University from our partner colleges is well-publicised on our website. These pathways are fully supported through the Associate Student Scheme, to help prepare students for university life while still at college, and the Degree Prep programme noted below. As with the 2020/21 Student Welcome, Degree Link information sessions have been moved online and provide a valuable opportunity for students who are currently at college in Scotland and interested in studying with us to learn about each of the Academic Schools and topics such as study skills, employability, inclusion and finance.



Institutions work with schools and local communities to support successful pathways for students

School engagement is a core strand of our activity to widen access. Within our local community, we undertake a range of engagement activities throughout the year including attendance at career fairs and delivering workshops on topics such as applying to university, how to choose a university as well as subject specific workshops and information about studying at RGU. These in-school activities are supplemented by close working with local schools to facilitate subject-specific workshops, such as careers in Health, or for open days and personalised campus visits. In addition to this regular engagement, we have a number of well-established bridging programmes, created with SHEP and other partner schools to ease learner journeys and provide a supportive transition into higher education including:

- The Northern Lights programme – this complements the ambitions of Aspire North, one of four regional programmes created to provide targeted support to schools with a progression to higher education rate of 22% or below. Northern Lights works with S1 and S2 pupils who have been referred by these schools and have the potential to achieve higher education entry, but are at risk of not fulfilling this potential. Initial sessions are held to introduce pupils and their parents and carers to the programme and the staff involved. Pupils then participate in five engagement sessions throughout the school year, which are designed to maximise the potential and develop the confidence of participants, with reflection encouraged at each stage.
- The ACES (Access to Creative Education in Scotland) programme – this supports pupils from MD20/40 backgrounds to enter high demand

professional degree courses. Currently, the subject offer includes Art and Design and Architecture.

- The Access To programme - this supports talented and committed S5 and S6 pupils who aim to study at degree level. Nine programmes are provided: Art and Design; Communication and Media; Computing; Engineering; Health Professions; Law/Law and Management; Life Sciences; Nursing and Midwifery; and Tourism, Hospitality and Events. Practical subject-focused sessions and support sessions are delivered by the university's academics. The sessions take place after school and are completely free of charge (including transport). The pupils on this programme become Associate Students, an initiative pioneered by RGU and now mandatory across all Scottish universities. This gives them access to the university's library and support services.
- The Degree Prep programme - this is designed to support the transition from studying at college to studying at university. It builds on the knowledge and experience gained at HN level to equip students with essential course information and study skills and to familiarise them with the university's staff, campus and facilities.

Since the start of the pandemic, we have developed online resources to ensure that school engagement is able to continue despite COVID-19 restrictions, including the development of an online programme for delivery of the ACES programme in the latter half of 2020/21 to schools in Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Moray, and the Highlands.

This work is assessed for impact on equality

The ACES programme underwent a national equality impact assessment in 2020 and as a provider of ACES, we have agreed with the findings of the impact assessment and pledged to ensure that equality is embedded in the provision of this programme.

This year we will complete an internal review of our widening access definitions with the aim to provide support across a greater range of characteristics in line with best practice across the sector.

Quality learning, teaching and participation

A high-quality student experience is vital to our mission to transform people and communities by providing demand-led teaching and research. Our continued focus on adopting a student-centred approach to deliver an inclusive and welcoming learning environment has resulted in us significantly exceeding



our benchmark for overall satisfaction in the National Student Survey 2020, with the highest performance above benchmark in Scotland and placing us as the 2nd highest Scottish institution and 2nd highest in the UK (excluding small specialist and private providers) for overall satisfaction. This performance is a continuation of a two-year improvement in NSS scores, reflecting our relentless pursuit of a student-centred approach. The success of this approach is further demonstrated in our ongoing strengths in retention, having consistently been above the Scottish average in this measure for the past five years. This ethos continues to be embedded in the delivery of blended learning and teaching, with the student-experience forming a core consideration of adaptations made to provide blended learning in 2020/21.

A survey undertaken in semester one of this academic year indicates that the

student experience of this new teaching and learning model has been positive to date. Recognising the importance of integrating the curriculum with skills needs in the workplace, we have instituted further integration between business engagement and teaching and learning activity through the institutional industry-informed approach, which encompasses course portfolio and content along with business and economic development activities to ensure that they are current and driven by demand.

People have the necessary meta-skills and attributes to succeed

The strong demand for our graduates is testament to the range of skills, experience, and knowledge that they are able to demonstrate. Our strong links with employers throughout the development, delivery and assessment



WE WERE SECOND IN SCOTLAND FOR OVERALL STUDENT SATISFACTION IN THE NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2020, AND SECOND IN THE UK *

*** EXCLUDING SMALL SPECIALIST AND PRIVATE PROVIDERS**

of courses ensures that the curriculum is current and relevant. Our continual enhancement processes and internal quality assurance process also mean that high quality learning and teaching is delivered consistently.

The Learning and Teaching Framework we launched in 2020 recognises that the process of ensuring students are fully equipped to enter the workplace seamlessly involves the application of digital skills, equipping students with the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours to self-learn and to adapt to changes throughout their careers. We recognise that building knowledge and skills in cyber security, data analysis, data manipulation, critical thinking and problem solving are vital to prepare students from any discipline for all future job roles. We are focused on embedding these into the curriculum and tracking developments through course review processes.

We are leading the way in producing innovative thinking students and became the first university in Scotland to be awarded Scottish Innovative Student Award (SISA) self-accreditation status from the Scottish Institute for Enterprise (SIE). Created by the SIE, the SISA scheme works alongside universities to design and deliver courses which equips students with a forward-thinking and enterprising mindset. The award is delivered through current modules as part of the students' regular degree programmes and has been designed in conjunction with Scotland's Innovation Centres; DataLab, Digital Health and Care Institute (DHCI) and Centre of Excellence for Sensing, Imaging and Internet of

Things (IoT) technologies (CENSIS). Over 470 students completed the award (37% of all of Scotland's award winners) and the number of accredited modules issuing the award across our academic schools was doubled.

These skills are also a priority for development by the current workforce and professional development is delivered through modules in the Upskilling initiative, funded by the SFC. We will also deliver courses such as MSc Data Science and MSc Data Analytics, which have fully funded places from The Data Lab (supported by the SFC) to ensure that students are equipped with the skills needed to start their data science career, including a three-month paid placement.

There is quality online and repurposed blended learning

Ensuring a high quality student experience has been a key focus for us in light of the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the closure of campus in March 2020, we were able to deliver teaching, learning and assessment in line with the usual academic timetable, providing stability to students. This success was a result of close planning and early engagement with the Students Union and sustained investment in our online services, an approach which has continued in to the 2020/21 academic session. All changes to assessments have been approved by relevant external examiners and by Academic Council and shared with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to ensure that students are not disadvantaged by changes in the processes.



In 2020/21 our approach has been to deliver a safe and supportive learning environment through the provision of a blended learning experience which combines online teaching with safe on-campus learning. As noted, the success of this approach has been verified through the positive results of the first semester student experience questionnaire.

Recognising that there are increased pressures and difficulties that may arise from the changed circumstances this academic year, we continue to closely monitor retention and attainment to identify when targeted interventions may be necessary. This has been undertaken with the inclusion of a specific risk highlighting student attainment and the student experience to the high-level risk register to ensure that these issues are addressed, monitored, and improved upon throughout the year. While we consider that blended learning

is the correct approach in the current circumstances, all Academic Schools have developed plans in the event that the local restrictions require an online-only learning experience.

Students and staff are supported in their mental health and wellbeing

Providing appropriate support for students to succeed in their studies and grow as individuals is a cornerstone of our strategy. We strive to sustain a culture that promotes and supports positive wellbeing and are committed to ensuring that students thrive throughout their course and graduate with a positive outcome. Our sustained commitment to support student's mental health and wellbeing is carried out in partnership with the Students' Union and underpinned by the joint Student **Mental Health Agreement**, signed in 2018. This sets out the Union's commitment as well as ours to improving the mental wellbeing of all

students and staff. It also aims to change perceptions of mental health among the student community, challenge negative attitudes, promote positive outcomes and support strategies to maximise the student and staff experience.

We have invested in online resources, such as Silvercloud (offering free and anonymous cognitive behavioural therapy across a range of areas such as depression, anxiety, stress, body image) and Lifeworks (offering resources and advice to those experiencing mental health issues along with resources to enable individuals to start conversations about their feelings with family and friends). These tools are available to staff, students, and alumni. The take-up of both services has increased over the period of the pandemic with both having been regularly promoted to support our community.

We have a comprehensive range of support services available for all students. The Counselling & Wellbeing service provides a safe space for students to access counsellors and wellbeing advisors for support on any issues or concerns. The Inclusion Centre provides information and advice to support students with dyslexia, sensory and mobility impairments, mental health difficulties, medical conditions, autism spectrum disorders and temporary impairments on a range of issues including applications for

disabled students' allowance, support in organising in-class support and an in-house assessment of needs. These services have been moved to blended provision, to enable continued access during the pandemic.

Our approach to providing a safe and healthy environment for our students is indicative of our wider commitment to deliver a high-quality and safe learning environment. We remain committed to a zero-tolerance approach to sexual violence and harassment and to providing a working and learning environment where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Our 'Report and Support' system has been adapted to ensure that remote support is available to those making a report of gender-based violence (GBV). We now have 34 first responders who are supported through regular peer network meetings. Additional information was added to Report & Support to provide pandemic-specific safety advice and new training modules have been made available to all staff and students. As part of the adapted Virtual Freshers Welcome, a series of courses were available for students on consent, bystander intervention and good citizenship, to inform and raise awareness of issues relating to GBV and make clear that the University is a welcoming, safe, and inclusive environment for all students.



WE ARE TOP IN SCOTLAND FOR EMPLOYMENT AND/OR FURTHER STUDY AS PER THE GRADUATE OUTCOMES SURVEY 2020.



Students have their voice heard and valued, and can influence their educational experience

We aim to deliver an excellent student experience through partnerships with students and in particular, the Students' Union. This partnership has been referenced above, specifically in relation to health and wellbeing and mental health. The Student Union is also involved in the preparation and monitoring of the Outcome Agreement through their membership of key committees, including the Board of Governors. Throughout the pandemic continued support was provided to the Student Union in preparation for the 2020/21 session. One element of this partnership has been to ensure that executive elections and recruitment of school officers, class representatives, student leaders of clubs and societies and other student positions

were able to take place in the 2020/21 academic session.

Learning with impact

We aim to extend the reach and relevance of learners' opportunities to gain employment and thrive in their professional career and to ensure a high-quality student experience. Our performance in this area is evidenced by our longstanding exemplary employability record, with the University top in Scotland for employment and/or further study (Graduate Outcomes Survey June 2020) and in our performance in the most recent NSS, in which our score for overall satisfaction was over 8 percentage points above benchmark – again, the top in Scotland.

Analysis and engagement: there is a good understanding of the needs of business and industry; and Scotland's economic recovery needs

The comprehensive relationships with industry and businesses are set out in more detail in section 3 below, along with our track record of business and economic support, regionally, nationally and internationally. The close relationships and an understanding of industry needs enabled us to respond quickly and purposefully to support the region, its businesses and working-age population as they dealt with the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In recognition of the widespread economic implications and the likely decline in employment opportunities for graduates to find professional-level employment we have undertaken a series of activities to provide support to new graduates through the Employability Enhancement Award programme, which ran during the summer months for new graduates to give them a boost to evidence their readiness to work; the extension of the number of Alumni mentors for current students; and the Summer School run by the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Group,

NEW RGU GRADUATES ENTERING POSTGRADUATE STUDY IN SEPTEMBER OR JANUARY 2020/21 WERE OFFERED A

33% DISCOUNT

again for new graduates to provide support and guidance about start-ups and freelancing. The provision of a discount for new graduates entering postgraduate study of 33% was implemented for both September and January 2020/21 courses to encourage recent graduates to take up further education to enhance their graduate careers. The Employability Hub has instigated a range of improvements to online provision to provide students and alumni with as many opportunities and vacancies as possible and all graduates receive an offer of support from the alumni team six months after graduation.

Delivering the right skills: there is a pipeline of appropriately skilled people for the labour market

We deliver a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses, all of which are vocational. Employability skills are embedded throughout the curriculum - a successful RGU graduate should be an experienced professional, creative innovator, confident life-long learner and global citizen. A measure of the success of our approach to the development, delivery and assessment of our courses is our our enviable record of previous success in the DLHE survey, which has been maintained in the publication of the first Graduate Outcomes Survey, with 97.6% of respondents in employment and/or further study, placing us as the top performing HEI in Scotland. This demonstrates our outstanding record for graduate employability both in absolute terms and overall sector performance.

In support of our strategic focus on vocational and professional education,



we have established extensive engagement with industry and professions in the design, approval, and delivery of our courses. In addition, wherever possible Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) accreditation is an integral part of course approval. This is illustrated by the fact that the majority of our undergraduate students are enrolled on PSRB accredited courses. The demand for our courses is based on our receptiveness and responsiveness to industry needs, which, alongside labour market intelligence (LMI), translates into the relevance of the whole range of the

portfolio, supported by the institutional industry-informed approach.

The entirety of the undergraduate and taught post-graduate portfolio is already based on skills demand and course content changes regularly to ensure it is current and relevant. We also undertake course portfolio analysis at the close of enrolment for each semester to identify potential suspensions/cessations. The School of Engineering is consulting with industry partners to evaluate the relevance of the existing portfolio and to explore future opportunities.

We use market insight and labour market intelligence to develop new courses, particularly at taught post-graduate level. Recently these have related to specific developments in Engineering connected with Biomechanics and in Architecture with course proposals being considered in relation to the future housing agenda, including low/zero carbon footprint and retrofitting. In addition, Heads of Schools are working closely with Business and Economic Development to explore new opportunities, such as the creation of a top up degree for the NHS. Developing our undergraduate programme further, we ensured that the BSc Hons Paramedic Practice was implemented for delivery in 2020/21.

We have developed a range of flexible routes into degree-level study through our commitment to articulation with advanced standing and the continual increase of such pathways between Scottish colleges and the University. We are one of Scotland's leading providers of Graduate Apprenticeships and succeeded in recruiting well in 2020/21 despite lock-down coinciding with the

WE ARE ONE OF SCOTLAND'S LEADING PROVIDERS OF GRADUATE APPRENTICESHIPS AND SUCCEEDED IN RECRUITING WELL IN 2020/21 DESPITE THE PANDEMIC, FILLING

95%

OF AVAILABLE PLACES

recruitment phase, filling 95% of available places. Due to this success and evidence of demand, we are currently recruiting for a February start for two programmes meaning that we will exceed our target for 2020/21 starts. Alongside this, we have developed a comprehensive portfolio of upskilling provision (further detailed below) 'RGU Knowledge Bites for Business' to support businesses and individuals through the sharing of insights and knowledge from the university's community of experts. Detail of the comprehensive range of support given to the health and social care sector to assist with the public health emergency arising from the pandemic is provided in section 4 below.

There is an appropriate provision to help people upskill and reskill

We continue to directly answer skills needs for the changing world of work. This has needed to be particularly responsive due to the impacts of the pandemic and energy transition on the region and further afield. To address reskilling, we updated our degree portfolio, particularly recognising the transition from oil and gas to clean energies. To address upskilling, we undertook an analysis of the local regional skills needs and produced a course development schedule, based on our prioritised sectors (Energy and Health and Social Care) and underpinning key themes. We particularly focused on identifying those courses that would be of value to people who are unemployed or at risk of redundancy. This change in approach was made possible through the support of the SFC Upskilling Fund, which provided fee waivers on a number of courses. We also decided to offer



additional credit-bearing Upskilling courses at a significantly reduced price as part of our range of measures to support economic recovery.

The Upskilling Fund allowed us to react very quickly to the pandemic by launching a series of prioritised courses in March where learners received a fee-waiver. The courses were met with great interest with over 1,000 people applying for places. We launched four courses with 374 students in March: Creative Entrepreneurship (two cohorts), Strategic Leadership, Strategic Digital Marketing and Resilience and Change Management. The courses received overwhelmingly positive feedback, had good attainment rates and were gender balanced.

We also started four new courses between August and November 2020. Those applicants who were unable to secure places in March were the first to be notified of the launch of the latest programmes. One of the four courses included 'Data Analytics for business decision making', recognising the demand for digital skills regionally and nationally. An 'Introduction to practical data science with Python' course will be launched later in the year.

The 2020/21 portfolio will also include a new customised course, 'Leading strategic innovation in health and social care' which will be piloted with senior managers within Grampian Health Board. This was postponed last year due to the immediate challenges of the pandemic for the NHS. In addition, we launched a new, free to access initiative in August 2020 to provide much-needed introductory level access to new insights and knowledge from our community of experts; RGU Knowledge Bites for Business has been highly successful and over 1,000 people have accessed the resources to date. Topics included 'The impact of COVID-19 on the energy sector', 'Keeping yourself safe online' and 'Integrating generation Z in the workplace'. The webinars were recorded, and these are now available on the RGU website along with other relevant content.

Equalities and inclusion

Inclusivity sits at the core of our purpose and we have a significant track record of fostering equality and diversity best practice which extends to every stage of the student journey and throughout the whole university community. Our

commitment to meeting the SFC's ambitious plans for gender balance are aligned with our ethos that access to our provision should be widened to address issues of under-representation.

Small but encouraging progress has been made with each School that has a severe gender imbalance seeing the highest proportion of entrants from their respective under-represented gender since 2015. Continuing previous strong performance, we continue to have a high proportion of BME and disabled Scottish domiciled undergraduate entrants with retention for both groups above the overall University average and target. As a result, we are among the top five performing institutions in Scotland in this measure for both BME and disabled students.

All students are supported to achieve their full potential

As part of our efforts to ensure that all students are supported to achieve their full potential, we undertake an annual equality monitoring exercise which provides analysis of the student population across protected characteristics through a range of measures including access, retention,

WE ARE AMONG THE TOP FIVE PERFORMING INSTITUTIONS IN SCOTLAND RETAINING BOTH BME AND DISABLED SCOTTISH DOMICILED STUDENTS.

achievement, satisfaction, and employability for consideration in annual course appraisal. This annual exercise has seen continual enhancement with refined reporting mechanisms to ensure that inequalities can be identified and addressed appropriately. Key issues highlighted through the 2020 monitoring exercise include: a continued inequality in the overall gender balance of the student population, that male students have lower achievement rates across a number of measures, that overall satisfaction is lower for BME and disabled respondents and that Honours achievement for BME students is below that of the University average. In line with our Public Sector Equality Duties of the Equality Act (2010) we are developing a refreshed set of Equality Outcomes this year, which aim to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and build good relations between different individuals and groups. These outcomes will be informed by the University's equality monitoring findings, noted above, to ensure that the Outcomes are based on the areas of greatest inequality with SMART targets to achieve real change. Further activity will continue in 2020/21 to implement the recommendations and drive change to deliver a safe and inclusive environment.

These revised outcomes will be subject to consultation amongst our community to ensure that staff and students have an opportunity to engage in this process and are informed about the steps that will be taken to advance equality.

Our approach to equality and diversity is embedded across our policy framework where each policy is required to undergo an impact assessment on the basis of

equality and human rights, sustainability, and privacy. The two core policies in this area, the Equality & Diversity Policy and the Dignity at Work & Study Policy will both be reviewed this year to align with best practice and to ensure that the recommendations of the Equality & Human Rights Commission (EHRC) report on tackling racial harassment are implemented along with best practice in relation to GBV.

Ahead of this policy review, pro-active steps have been taken to begin to implement the EHRC recommendations to ensure that our University community is safe and inclusive for all. This includes support to reinvigorate the Staff Race Equality Network, a comprehensive programme of events to celebrate Black History Month which included safe space discussions for BIPOC staff and students to share their lived experiences and to instigate discussions of steps that we can take to make changes and improvements. We have also integrated hate crime reporting into the existing Report & Support online platform and senior leaders have engaged in a culture shift day to understand how to bring about effective change.

In 2020/21 we aligned our equality committees more closely with the University committee structure. This move ensures that initiatives, issues, and campaigns to promote equality and diversity across our Community are brought within the decision-making structures of the University. We strive to have a diverse and representative membership across all our forum. In addition, we have included equality champions for each protected characteristic among the

OUR REPORT & SUPPORT ONLINE PLATFORM FOR REPORTING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE HAS BEEN EXPANDED TO INTEGRATE HATE CRIME REPORTING.

staff and student population to provide those with lived experiences a voice and the opportunity to participate in implementing improvements to enhance the inclusivity of our community.

A close-up photograph of a Black male scientist in a white lab coat looking through a microscope. The background shows a laboratory with various glassware and equipment. A blue geometric overlay is present in the top-left and bottom-right corners.

Section 2

Outcomes for research



In line with our strategic aim to grow globally recognised impactful research we have continued to grow our research base in areas where we can make the biggest impact in the community we serve. We have exceeded our Outcome Agreement target for income from UK Research Councils and prior to the pandemic, had seen a significant growth in overall research income. This success has been achieved through significant awards from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) and a significant award from the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC), achieved by an early career researcher. This performance is an indicator of an increasingly strong and vibrant research culture and the growing success of our strategy to focus on areas of impactful research and preparation for REF 2021.

Staff are increasingly undertaking excellent research that is recognised for publication through the process of peer review. This growth was recognised in the QS World University Rankings 2020 in which the University was ranked for citations, with a score per faculty member only 2.5 away from the global median. This is a significant achievement considering the majority of participating institutions are 'research intensive'. Further recognition of the increasingly

vibrant research culture was the inclusion of seven RGU academics in a Stanford University study which shows the top 2% of the world's most-cited researchers in major fields.

Research excellence

Institutions produce excellent research outputs

We are committed to actively supporting and encouraging interdisciplinary research across all areas. Notably, our work in Orkney, a project for public benefit, is an important example of this. The Orkney Project Development Manager is now based in the recently established Orkney Research and Innovation Campus and provides a focus for our engagement with Orkney Islands Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the local community and other stakeholders.

By focusing our expertise in Orkney to find effective solutions to some of the challenges of island life, a number of projects and partnerships are now underway which highlight and respond to the needs of the local community. The Orkney Project is aligned to the strategic priorities identified by Orkney Islands Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), including the Orkney Community Plan 2018-21, with research grouped into three broad clusters: smart islands, creative innovation, and



sustainable quality of life. The project has already had a considerable impact in the local community with various initiatives seeing our academics visiting the islands to collaborate with a diverse range of local organisations.

Since the establishment of the research hub in Stromness, the project has grown in reach and impact as we become embedded in the local academic and community framework. The Scottish Government has approved the outline business case and work is progressing on the full business case for this significant development, with Heads of Terms signed by the Orkney Islands Council and the Scottish Government.

The Strength in Places project started as a bid we submitted to UKRI jointly with Opportunity North East (ONE),

the University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council and the Oil and Gas Transition Centre to develop a world-leading energy transition cluster. The original submission was unsuccessful but has established excellent working relationships between the partners and joint work continues linking to energy transitions and feeding directly into the Energy Transition Zone proposal's strands on skills, research and innovation. We remain committed to this joint working, which will result in major economic developments for the region.

We are collaborating on the Triple Helix project with NHS Grampian and the University of Aberdeen to take a joint approach to research challenges posed by NHS Grampian, relating initially to patient flows and data/imaging.

A STUDY CONDUCTED BY STANFORD UNIVERSITY WHICH SHOWS THE WORLD'S MOST-CITED RESEARCHERS INCLUDED SEVEN RGU ACADEMICS, HIGHLIGHTING OUR VIBRANT RESEARCH CULTURE.

For 2020/21, much of our research activity will depend on the impact to funding caused by Brexit. In addition, any changes in access to UKRI funding, which may occur subsequent to a potential Scottish Independence referendum, may also impact our plans for growth. We have taken steps to review our position and consider the implications of funding changes following announcements by the UK Government, which means any action we take is likely to be carried out on a reactive basis once the details are known. Any restriction or loss of access to either of these sources of funding will be damaging to the HE research-base across Scotland. However, until we are excluded from access to European or UKRI funds, we will continue to invest significant efforts in applying for them. and of political change. The focus for 2020/21 will be on finalising and submitting our REF2021 submission.

The research impact reaches beyond academia

It is part of our mission to transform people and communities by contributing to cultural development regionally and nationally through demand-led teaching

RGU AND THE OGTC ARE IMPLEMENTING THEIR VISION FOR THE NATIONAL SUBSEA CENTRE, A MULTI-MILLION POUND CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR SUBSEA TECHNOLOGY.

and research. There are many examples of this approach, including those above. Details of three areas are provided here to illustrate the range of work underway.

The most significant research investment that we are undertaking is the forthcoming National Subsea Centre (NSC), a critical investment for the region. This multi-million-pound partnership with the Oil and Gas Technology Centre (OGTC) is a central component of the innovation strand of the Aberdeen City Region Deal and will harness our academic expertise, research capability and facilities to establish a world-class research and development centre, focused on tackling the underwater challenges faced by industry. Although the operation of the Centre has been delayed due to the pandemic, we continue to make real progress and have the firm commitment of all partners.

The focus of the NSC’s research activity is being shaped in close collaboration with industry partners, with the aim being to support the delivery of Vision 2035 and the drive towards a net zero basin through the development of cost effective, faster, smarter and cleaner technology that can be developed with, and deployed across, the industry and to anchor that work in the North-East of Scotland. Linking industry demand and expertise with academic capability and skills, the NSC will support a collaborative approach to problem solving in areas involving communications, data, energy integration, remote monitoring and underwater robotics. This ambitious project will increase regional and national recognition of our capabilities in innovation and marine research and help secure increased private sector



investment in demand-led research for industry. With one new Professor having started in January and a second starting in early February, these key staff bring specialisms in artificial intelligence and affective computing as well as intelligent information processing, visual computing and multi-media signal processing. We are also progressing discussions on research collaboration between the NSC and the University of Strathclyde.

Our collaboration with the Torry Development Trust and Grampian Housing Association brings together expertise in health and social care, architecture and the creative arts, to inform and design the regeneration of the former Victoria Road School in Torry. The project received planning approval in June 2020 and will provide an innovative and sustainable housing development and learning centre for the community of Torry, Aberdeen.

Staff and senior students from various disciplines, including architecture and occupational therapy, will work in collaboration with the Torry Development Trust through interprofessional groups for the benefit of the community. A

specific emphasis of the collaboration is the adoption of an approach that focuses on the positive impact to create health and wellbeing in daily life. This is an example of a multi-disciplinary, multi-level partnership which translates to real benefits for the local community and to the staff and students involved in project, all of which aligns closely with several of the Scottish Government’s National Outcomes.

We make a significant contribution to the development of the creative industries in the North East of Scotland through the work of Gray’s School of Art. Our flagship Look Again visual arts and design programme has firmly established a year-round presence in the region and promotes the value of creativity and culture to Aberdeen city, spotlighting, supporting and retaining creative talent emerging from the region. This contributes directly to the Scottish Government’s National Outcome for Culture which honours, celebrates and supports Scotland’s creative talent and recognises that arts and culture bring social and economic benefits.

In 2020/21, we will launch a digital platform to enhance the market reach of creative industry SMEs by collecting, mapping, and bringing stories to life, digitally connecting places, experiences or products with local heritage. The €1m 'StoryTagging' project is funded in part by the Northern Periphery and Arctic (NPA) Programme of the European Union. It is an interdisciplinary and collaborative project, combining the expertise from the School of Creative and Cultural Business, School of Computing and Gray's School of Art together with international partners from Sweden, Finland, and Russia. The purpose is to harness a sense of place; identity and community; folklore; cultural heritage; landscape and natural heritage; and archaeology. It takes what makes the area distinctive to the people who live and work there to increase the market reach of local products such as textiles, craft work and jewellery. Up to 30 stories will be collected in each partner country and mapped via the platform (an enhanced version of our existing 'Story Trails' platform in Orkney). Project partners will collaborate with five SMEs in each country to bring stories to life through new products or works. The platform will be promoted

THE STORYTAGGING PROJECT IS WORTH €1MILLION AND FUNDED IN PART BY THE NORTHERN PERIPHERY AND ARCTIC PROGRAMME OF THE EUROPEAN UNION.

internationally, and digital marketing models will be applied to enhance the market reach of participating creatives. Visitors accessing stories will access information about participating SMEs and their products and works, with links for online visitors to purchase, access and participate remotely. The platform will also push online traffic to established tourist and visitor information sites. It will collect data analytics, allowing creatives to better understand their customers and audiences to help design and refine future products and works.

The intention is that at the end of the project the platform will be available to communities and creatives across the NPA area and a not-for profit business model will be adopted to ensure the long-term sustainability of the digital platform. This project will secure public and cultural engagement and importantly provide much-needed support for creative SMEs in line with the policies of the Scottish Government, Creative Scotland, and the Enterprise Agencies.

Research sustainability (incorporates collaboration)

We have recently made significant progress in delivering greater research sustainability through not only growing the pipeline of PhD students and early career researchers but in providing training and support to develop those individuals. Our efforts to develop an increasingly vibrant research culture, includes the establishment of a single Graduate School to coordinate support for postgraduate researchers and enhance collaboration and the creation of the Researcher Training Co-ordinator



post, which has supported growing researcher development activities. Joint work between the Head of the Graduate School, the Research, Strategy and Policy Team and the Department for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Access (DELTA) this year has continued to develop and implement new approaches, including online modules and mentoring

support. Our aim is to provide both generic skills training (including proposal writing, research integrity and REF2021) and state-of-the-art, discipline-specific training across all areas of the university's research portfolio, including the Early Career Researcher Network.

The research environment supports excellence and impact

We have introduced research sabbaticals as part of our wider efforts to support research excellence. This programme allows researchers to have dedicated time for research activity and grant writing. By freeing up time for focused research activity and providing improved facilities for research, our Research Excellence Grant (REG) is being targeted towards those with a track-record of delivering high quality research. This provides an improved research environment and supports early career researcher training and development. This approach is already bearing fruit as our researchers pursue projects that carry authentic community impact, as evidenced by the extended range of research partnerships. The sabbatical policy is proving to be highly effective and is one reason for an improvement in the number of larger grant applications being submitted to UKRI and an increase in research revenues from them.

We recognise the vital importance of early career researchers to the provision of successful, impactful research. A network for early career researchers has been re-launched with an active calendar of events to facilitate and support our research pipeline. We have continued to see an increasing number of new proposals from early career researchers. We are also actively engaged in the pan-Scotland Arts and Humanities Research Council and Economic and Social Research Council Graduate Schools and are committed to supporting participation in the Aurora programme, which is now complemented by an

extensive, progressive internal leadership programme. For 2020/21 ten academics and one professional service staff are being supported to participate in the Aurora Online Programme. We continue to focus on high quality and targeted applications to ensure that work required for the REF 2021 submission is completed.

Institutions implement the researcher development concordant

The RGU Researcher Development Programme was launched in September 2020 and offers opportunities to broaden knowledge and skills as well as foster interdisciplinary dialogue as part of a vibrant research culture. These sessions are mapped to the Vitae Researcher Development Framework domains including knowledge and intellectual abilities, personal effectiveness, research governance and organisation, and engagement, influence and impact. The programme includes over fifty workshops, masterclasses and events which supplement and expand on PgCert Researcher Development courses and research retreats run by the Graduate School.

Support for PhD students, who are the pipeline of talent for future research and who have been adversely affected by the instability created by the pandemic

With the closure of the campus in March 2020, we undertook specific measures to support PhD students during this challenging period. This included participation in the Universities Scotland research & development forum to share best practice and ensure that our

approach was in line with best practice in the sector.

All postgraduate research students were offered a six-month break in their studies, coupled with an equivalent tuition fee free period to allow them to take a break in their studies if required. We also carried out an institution-wide impact assessment of COVID-19 across each academic school which allowed postgraduate students to identify where additional consideration or support would be required. We then assessed all submissions on an individual basis on what support should be provided.

The additional funding provided by the SFC in June 2020, has been used to support hardship funding for postgraduate research students, to address digital poverty for these students and to support a training programme for graduate students and early career researchers to upskill in grant applications and paper writing.

A group of students in a laboratory setting, wearing safety goggles and focused on their work. The image is overlaid with a blue geometric shape containing text.

Section 3

**Outcomes
for economic
recovery and
social renewal →**

Responsive institutions

Our mission makes a clear commitment to our positive contribution to economic, social, and cultural development regionally, nationally, and internationally. The pandemic has focussed efforts in this area, which cover a wide range of university activity, from access to our undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses and their close links with professional bodies and industry contacts, the wide range of placements and work-related experiences through the supply of highly skilled graduates and our work with industry and our partnerships with colleges, particularly NESCoI, and in our work to support economic and social growth.

Our longstanding reputation for outstanding graduate employment has been demonstrated in successive years by our performance in DLHE and this has been maintained in the first Graduate Outcomes Survey (published July 2020), with 97.6% of undergraduates in employment and/or further study, making it top in Scotland for this measure. This performance is underpinned by our approach to engagement with employers and accreditation wherever possible from Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) for undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Our Business School was the first in the world to achieve joint Association of MBA and Business Graduates Association accreditation.

Institutions use labour market intelligence (LMI) to align provision

We are renowned for our extensive engagement with industry and professional bodies in the design, approval, monitoring and delivery of our courses, many of which are professionally accredited. The process for new course proposals includes a mandatory review of the skills requirements, LMI and market analysis. Not only does this intelligence enable us to design and maintain relevant courses, but it also means that the appropriate meta-skills can be embedded within the curriculum. Insight on key markets is developed, shared, and updated on a monthly basis and drives evidence-based decision making in course development, marketing, and recruitment.

We have also used a market insight approach to analyse the regional and national position regarding MD20 recruitment in respect of factors such as young people within MD20 postcodes and secondary school attainment. This significant work has been shared with Outcome Agreement Managers and has informed thinking about future approach to widening access to the University. Market insight is often supplemented with labour market information to ensure that our provision is aligned to known skills gaps regionally and nationally.

Alongside this, we have a close relationship with national and regional skills and economic development bodies such as Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Scottish Enterprise (SE), Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and ONE who provide critical LMI. The close consideration of skills reports, including those we generate ourselves such as



the work with OPITO (UKCS Workforce Dynamics 2018–2035 Shaping the skills of tomorrow), drives the review of current course content and the development of new course proposals.

The demand for our courses and the success of our business development is based on our receptiveness and responsiveness to industry needs, which, alongside LMI, translates into the current relevance of the whole range of the portfolio. These relationships add the important qualitative element to supplement quantitative surveys and place their results in the regional context.

We have a successful track record of maximising our impact through planning and delivery with wide range of partners and stakeholders and this work has been prioritised to focus on the challenges faced during and following the pandemic. Our significant alliances include:

- To support growth in key regional economic areas, we partner with ONE through roles on the board and sector workstreams of the regional economic development body. Working alongside University of Aberdeen and North East Scotland College, we have been active partners in the support of the development of the Energy Transition Zone (ETZ) led by ONE.
- We are also active in other regional boards and policy councils including Invest Aberdeen, Aberdeen Grampian Chamber of Commerce Policy Council and Seedpod (the development of a North East Scotland food hub).
- The Director of our Energy Transition Institute (ETI) is active on a number of energy task forces and advisory groups including



the Scottish Government’s Senior Industry Leadership Group for Oil and Gas and Energy Transition, Scotland’s Climate Change Assembly Stewarding Group, Aberdeen City Net Zero Vision Delivery Unit and the OGTC.

- We play a significant role in the achievement of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan through our membership of the Aberdeen Community Planning Partnership and has been active in other regional groups responding to the impact of the pandemic including, regional skills partnerships.
- Our approach to ensuring the relevance and quality of our courses enable us to offer relevant accredited professional qualifications through collaboration with professional and statutory bodies, as well as engagement with

employers. Industry representatives are involved in each stage of course development and delivery, including as visiting lecturers and as external members of exam boards.

- We developed our provision of Graduate Apprenticeship frameworks in collaboration with Skills Development Scotland. Our approach to work-based learning has enabled an annual growth in the overall number and reach of Graduate Apprenticeships, including high levels of recruitment in 2020/21, with a second intake in February 2021.
- Supported by the SFC, we implemented successfully the Upskilling programme in 2019/20 and 2020/21, with courses that increase our provision of flexible solutions to support businesses and individuals.

- Over the last year, our close partnership NHS Grampian has led to initiatives that support essential workforce development. These include; the development of a specific upskilling course for senior managers, the development of a top-up course enables the Health Board to meet the requirements of the Magnet accreditation; and support to facilitate the Health Board’s ability to react effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic – this is described further in section 4 below.

Institutions play their part in upskilling and reskilling the existing workforce

The details of the successful upskilling programme delivered in 2019/20 is outlined above under **Learning with Impact**.

A further example of workforce development is our joint work with NHS Grampian to create a bespoke solution to the need for senior nurses without a first degree to achieve that qualification. We recognise the considerable prior experiential learning of these individuals and have created a one-year top up degree to develop their educational base and enhance their skill set in the generic aspects of leadership, quality improvement and professional practice. The course will run over the academic year 2020/21.

Our support for reskilling is also illustrated by the launch of the BSc Paramedic Practice, which will ensure that new entrants to the profession will have a degree-level qualification. This course started in 2020/21 and was in very high demand with a high proportion

of more mature applicants who were looking to change direction and re-skill.

Institutions help find pathways for people without work to study and move into employment

The closeness of our relationship with professional bodies and employers allows us to develop a curriculum that addresses specific skills needs, extending the reach and relevance of our provision to drive employability and support individuals to thrive throughout their careers. We maintain a strong focus on providing learner opportunities for people of all backgrounds and at all stages of their careers. Our flexible, accessible curriculum and work-based learning opportunities support the upskilling and reskilling of both individuals and employers.

We are proud of the breadth of our offer and the wide range of opportunities to enter University study, including through Graduate Apprenticeships, articulation from college, access through the widening access programme and the recognition of prior experiential learning. The number of mature (over 21) individuals accessing our courses is growing, particularly in the subjects relating to health and social care and in the Graduate Apprenticeships, demonstrating our strength in meeting matching skills demand with individuals’ desire to change their career path or to upskill. We have extended our principle of accreditation of prior experiential learning to the Graduate Apprenticeship scheme and so eligible applicants are able to enter in the second year of the programmes.

We are also developing shorter, more flexible routes to access higher education through developments such as the upskilling programme outlined above and in line with the SFC guidance, the unemployed and those at risk of redundancy will be prioritised for fee waivers on these courses.

Since the start of the pandemic, we have actively participated in new initiatives and regional discussions in relation to employment and skills. These include the ETZ Energy Skills Academy, the ONE led Future Skills Partnership which focuses on digital skills, Aberdeen City Council-led New Year, New Skills, New Start and the Regional Skills Partnership.

Work-ready

There is a pipeline of technically skilled people for key industries where skills gaps are identified, recognising that the job market will be severely impacted by COVID-19

Our approach to ensuring the relevance of our courses in response to skills gaps has been set out above. In recognition of the devastating effect of the pandemic on the jobs market regionally and nationally, we introduced a specific risk to our High-Level Risk Register relating to student employability. A range of actions have been taken to mitigate against this risk and our impact on our graduating students:

- A graduate discount on taught post-graduate study was created for those graduating in academic year 2020/21 to recognise the fact that such study may be an option of interest to more students given the economic situation.

- Further enhancements of the digital EHub platform through the inclusion of job-sourcing materials such as Job Teaser and Student Circus (focussed on opportunities for international students).
- Enhanced activities to support graduates including an offer of continued careers support for a period of six months after graduation.
- Launch of the Employability Enhance Award programme for new graduates in 2019/20, leading to LinkedIn badges and the introduction of further on-line industry-led employability events.
- Establishment of the bespoke Accelerator Summer School for new graduates in 2019/20 to support those who wish to set up their own business, linking with the Accelerator and the Creative Accelerator.
- Development of the availability of mentoring for graduates from alumni.
- Our work with SMEs to support hiring processes including the creation of a virtual assessment centre.
- Recognising the implications for current students, the Employability Hub has been continuing to support the provision of placements and work-related experiences in a virtual environment.



Innovation

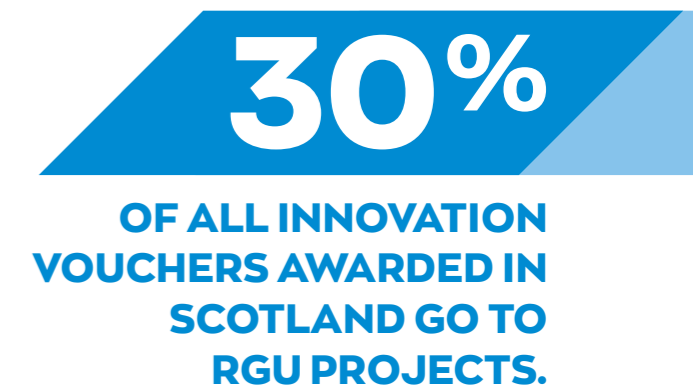
Institutions are focussing and prioritising their knowledge exchange and innovation activity on Scotland's recovery

We welcome the recognition by the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery that the role of education in the recovery of the economy post-COVID-19 is paramount. This is in keeping with our strategic aim 'to stimulate economic development and support organisations to be more successful'. In March 2020, we developed a three-step plan in response to the pandemic to support existing business relationships; support businesses as they deal with restrictions due to the pandemic; and support businesses to be on the front foot when restrictions are eased post-pandemic.

Wherever possible this is to be done through the support of government-funded mechanisms, which include Knowledge Exchange, Upskilling short

courses and Graduate Apprenticeships. Our approach has been recognised nationally and successful examples include:

- Performing top in Scotland for the number of Innovation Vouchers – 30% of all vouchers awarded go to RGU projects. In the period March to December 2020 we secured 32 innovation vouchers. These include respirator developments and developing new markets and processes in response to the pandemic with a wide range of SMEs across many sectors.



- Four KTPs were awarded in the last six months of 2019/20, primarily focused on market development and diversification. Although discussions with these companies including Deans of Huntly, Sutherlands of Portsoy and Harris Tweed Ltd. started pre-pandemic, the eventual projects will be focussed on recovery during and after the pandemic.
- We take a solutions-focused approach with companies, illustrated by the innovative method of delivery and the range of courses in the Graduate Apprenticeship programme, which also plays a critical role in support of economic recovery. We succeeded in recruiting 161 Graduate Apprentices during lockdown for a September 2020 start and are now looking to recruit to our Semester two intake for the programme. We were also the first university to use the SDS's 'Adopt an Apprentice' scheme which secures new employment for Graduate Apprentices when they are made redundant.

We have also focussed our entrepreneurship and innovation activities on economic recovery, reflected structurally in the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Group (EIG) reporting into the Associate Vice-Principal Business and Economic Development. Our innovation activity and support for start-up companies have continued to run effectively despite the

pandemic, with a focus on supporting businesses and individuals to react creatively and effectively.

In response to the national lockdown, all accelerator work was moved online and has been able to continue to provide high level support and seed funding to 46 start-ups across two cohorts. These start-up companies have gone onto to create 39 FTE jobs, raise £1.4m in investment and win several Converge and ScottishEdge Awards.

The second cohort celebrated its success in a virtual Start-Up Sunday event launched by Ivan McKee, the Scottish Minister for Trade, Innovation and Investment and ten finalists battled for additional financial support.

The creative accelerator has been continued virtually as part of the Upskilling offer and is a key part of the activities focussed around the Look Again festival to support and retain creative talent in the region. In response to the pandemic and challenges facing graduates, an Entrepreneurship Summer School was launched to assist new graduates looking to start ventures, become self-employed or freelancers. The programme was run fully online and involved the creation of eight new online modules and eight virtual workshops. Thirty-three graduates completed the programme and received an RGU Enterprise Enhancement Award. The online modules have since been launched for free access to current students as a 'start-up toolkit'.



Building upon the foundation of the successful Library Innovation Network Aberdeenshire (LINA) programme, a new entrepreneurship programme is being finalised. This is funded by Aberdeenshire Council's Young Person's Guarantee funding and is aimed at 16-24-year-olds across the whole of Aberdeenshire. The 'Enterprise Booster' programme will support the introduction of the Scottish Government's 'No One Left Behind' Employability Funding Stream, as part of the implementation of the Young Persons Guarantee, to deliver a more flexible and user-based model of employability support for young people. The five online programmes, each lasting six weeks, will be delivered throughout 2021 commencing in March.

In addition, a new Student Innovation Challenge ran last Spring, with a focus on the innovative, positive contributions our students were making to the pandemic. A total of 55 entries were submitted and five students won £500 each to support their work, which ranged from creating volunteering groups to creating audio versions of theatre productions.

STARTUP COMPANIES FROM RGU'S ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME HAVE GONE ON TO CREATE 39 FTE JOBS, RAISE

£1.4m

IN INVESTMENT AND WIN SEVERAL CONVERGE AND SCOTTISHEDGE AWARDS.



WE WERE THE FIRST UNIVERSITY TO USE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SCOTLAND'S 'ADOPT AN APPRENTICE' SCHEME.



Section 4

**Responsive and
collaborative →**

ARI FLUORO



The last nine months have been an extraordinary period of change due to the pandemic, with our priority being ensuring that students and staff can continue to work in a safe environment; the rapid rate of change is unprecedented and is testament to our responsive and collaborative culture. Our efforts have been devoted to ensuring that our courses and assessments could be provided via high-quality, effective online provision; all of our wide-range of student services, including vital mental health support, could be accessed online. In addition, our staff across Schools and Estates have carried out significant work to ensure that the campus was ready and safe to accommodate staff and students at the start of the new academic year, in line with our commitment to provide a blended learning model.

We have worked in close partnership with the Students' Association to ensure open and clear communication with students throughout this process to ensure that whilst they are aware of the Government's restrictions, they

also feel safe and supported. We also worked closely with NHS Grampian to release final year health and social care students in appropriate disciplines to enter the workforce early and help the NHS cope with the pressures caused by the pandemic. Testing services are currently operational for students who live in Aberdeen during term-time and are planning to return home over the Christmas period and additional support was made available to students who are remaining in University managed accommodation during that time. We have actively engaged in the COVID-19 leads meetings with Government representatives and others and provided up to date data to the SFC so that on-campus activity and withdrawals can be monitored and has implemented the revised guidance about the return to campus following the Christmas break.

Public Health Emergency

We have been actively responding to the public health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This has involved

ensuring that high quality learning, teaching and assessments can continue safely and effectively, and that students and staff are supported appropriately. It has also involved close working with the NHS and the Scottish Social Services Council to provide direct support to cover for staff who were unable to work for all or part of the lockdown period and support for businesses. In summary, this support has included:

- Over 300 Nursing and Midwifery students were able to join the NHS workforce in areas across Grampian, Tayside and the Highlands and Islands whilst continuing their studies.
- 62 final year Social Care students entered the workforce early and in June, many final year postgraduate students followed suit. Many of these students were working in statutory settings in children's and

adult services, including supporting vulnerable people in their own homes. Students from other years provided personal care or worked in care homes. We also seconded some staff from the School to go back into practice on a part-time basis.

- Students in their final year of study of Diagnostic Radiography, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and Dietetics, along with those studying Biomedical Sciences, entered the Health and Care Professions COVID-19 temporary register. Many students in earlier years worked in support and volunteer roles.
- We provided training to 370 staff from across Allied Health Professions, specialist nurses, dental nurses, and medical students in our clinical simulation facilities to allow them to take up work on the front line.



- Staff from Gray's School of Art and the School of Engineering created PPE that was durable but also environmentally considerate for use by staff and students working in acute and non-acute healthcare settings.
- An Innovation Voucher was secured to enable the development of a design for an innovative respirator.
- Collaboration with NHS Grampian led to a bespoke module to support senior managers to navigate and lead through a time of massive change and challenge. This will be delivered as part of this year's upskilling programme.

Institutions take steps to ensure the health and well-being and best interests of their students during the emergency period

The health and wellbeing of students remains our priority; this has involved the transfer of all support services to be delivered online and the introduction of additional counsellor time, supported by the investment of £85,000 by the SFC.

Our courses are run in a blended format and all include pastoral care sessions so that academic staff have dedicated time to address student concerns. Our University managed accommodation teams have worked tirelessly to support students who have had to self-isolate and those who have been unwell. This has included regular check ins by the ResLife team, provision of food and essentials and the establishment of dedicated rooms to allow students living outside halls to self-isolate in a safe and supported environment. More information about the extensive activity

in this area is provided in the **quality learning, teaching and support section**.

Appropriate mental health support is available

Our rapid response to the pandemic ensured that all academic and student support services moved online at the end of the last academic year. The digitisation of support services and the financial support from the SFC to appoint additional counselling provision has meant that the capacity of support services has increased, and more flexible patterns of provision have been implemented. Further details about this are provided in the **quality learning, teaching and support section above**.

Collaboration

Institutions find new ways of working together to support coherent, sustainable provision, research, and financially viable institutions in Scotland

The wide range of partnerships and collaborations that underpin our success and commitment to meet our strategic aims have been described in section 3. We have a longstanding relationship with NESCoI, and we have both committed to extending the breadth and impact of our partnership. Early in September the Principals of both the University and NESCoI met with the Chief Executive of the SFC to outline our new joint working relationship. This led to an anonymised case study outlining the partnership being included in the phase one report of the SFC's Review of Coherent and Sustainable provision. We have undertaken the first meeting of the Joint Strategy and Delivery Board following

Photo by Alyssa Bossom on Unsplash



which we have agreed to develop a series of joint activities through an operational enabling group. These areas include: (i) co-design and co-delivery of courses; (ii) joint marketing and recruitment activities; (iii) business links; (iv) continuing professional development; (v) micro-credentialing; and (vi) reviewing ways to develop closer links between the Outcome Agreements of the two institutions.

Aside from our own focus on innovation support for economic recovery, we will continue to develop our involvement in the Research & Commercialisation Directors' Group (RCDG) activities (including the review of the UIF), working with other universities to jointly consider national opportunities and initiatives. This strategic partnership approach will be a key element in our drive to create significantly greater impact. This is exemplified through the creation of

the NSC with OGTC; the ONE TechHub with ONE and CodeBase; and the work undertaken following the Strength in Places bid with University of Aberdeen, ONE, OGTC, Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council to develop a world-leading energy transition cluster for the North-East of Scotland.

Climate emergency

Colleges and universities demonstrate innovative approaches in their response to the climate emergency. Evidence of transformative leadership and the empowerment of sector communities, building capacity in institutional structures, developing a place-based response to the climate emergency

Sustainability forms one of the key enablers of our strategy, along with the requirement to diversify sources of

revenue to reduce reliance on public funding, achieve efficient and sustainable operations and fulfil our responsibility to reduce the environmental impact of our operations. The importance of this activity has been highlighted by the challenges brought by the pandemic, particularly in relation to financial sustainability and the importance of securing a green recovery from the pandemic. These challenges have been articulated in our response and forecasts for the SFC and in our response to the consultation element of the Review of Coherent and Sustainable provision.

We have undertaken a series of activities in response to the climate emergency demonstrating our ambition to reduce our carbon footprint and lead the way in enabling other sectors to respond actively:

- Approved a Climate Change & Sustainability Framework, providing a clear sense of direction on how we will work to reduce our carbon footprint and provide a sector-leading energy offering in teaching and research, thereby harnessing our expertise to provide leadership regionally and nationally in this area.
- Switched to purchasing all electricity from renewable resources, reducing our carbon footprint at source.

- Secured funding from the SFC Universities Financial Transactions Program for projects that are estimated to contribute to a saving of over 400t CO₂e per annum.

These actions have resulted in a further reduction in our carbon emission against target, year on year, consistently for the last five years. Significantly we exceeded our own target for CO₂e reduction in 2019/20, achieving a reduction of 79t CO₂e from the previous year.

The Framework identifies a series of actions in a three-year plan to reduce carbon emissions on our campus, to re-balance our course portfolio thereby ensuring it embodies our climate emergency and sustainability ambitions and to undertake thought leadership and innovation to drive national change towards a net-zero future.

We have previously utilised SFC funding to drive carbon reduction through energy efficiency and sustainability initiatives and in 2020/21 secured a further £2.1m to implement energy savings with an expected reduction of 6% in carbon reductions in Scope 1 and 2. The carbon footprint of our staff and students has been measured with plans to implement further campaigns to encourage active and green travel, building on success with the 'Go-Green' initiative and infrastructure improvements to support the use of electric vehicles.



We have made significant progress in relation to the campus, particularly around the reduction and recycling of waste. This supports the Scottish Government's target to reduce waste and increase recycling by 2025 and contributes to the reduction of carbon emissions in line with the national commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2045. Largely due to the impact of the pandemic we will achieve lower than forecasted emissions for waste and business/employee travel carbon emissions in 2020/21.

We recognise that supporting a place-based response to the climate emergency is key to achieving the national commitments for net carbon zero. In September 2019, the Energy Transition Institute worked jointly with Oil and Gas UK to produce the energy industry's Roadmap to 2035: A Blueprint for Net-Zero, which outlined the sector's

contribution to the UK and Scottish Government net-zero ambitions. This major initiative has fostered discussion within the University and the articulation of our ambition to achieve net carbon neutral performance. Building on this progress, we have undertaken a range of thought leadership and innovation activities including webinars on energy transition to align with the appetite of local industries to move towards renewable energy, and actively participates in the Scotland Climate Assembly Stewarding Group, as well as engaging in the proposed development of an Energy Transition Zone in Aberdeen.

79 ↓ **WE HAVE EXCEEDED OUR OWN TARGET FOR CO₂e REDUCTION IN 2019/20 ACHIEVING A REDUCTION OF 79 TONNES CO₂e FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR.**
TONNES

University Outcome Agreement Impact Framework: Supporting Data

Measure	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	19/20 actual	2020-21 as proposed by SFC originally	2020-21 as proposed by SFC Feb 21	20/21 actual	Notes
A Number of Scottish-domiciled Undergraduate Entrants	2,237	2,239	2,308	2,425	2,377	2,389	2,320	2,389	2,389	2745	Accept
B Total number of Scottish-domiciled HN entrants from Scottish colleges to undergraduate programmes		669	734	802	705		708			752	Accept
Number of Scottish-domiciled HN entrants from Scottish colleges to undergraduate programmes with Advanced Standing		429	513	532	457		394			405	
Proportion of Scottish-domiciled HN entrants from Scottish colleges to undergraduate programmes with Advanced Standing		64.1%	69.9%	66.3%	64.8%		55.60%	64.8%	55.6%	53.90%	
C COWA measure: Total number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree entrants	1,943	1,963	2,120	2,184	2,177	2,253	2,181			2409	Accept
COWA measure: Number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree entrants from the 20% most deprived areas	136	132	136	142	146	117	113			156	
COWA measure: Proportion of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree entrants from the 20% most deprived areas	7.0%	6.7%	6.4%	6.5%	6.7%	5.2%	5.20%	5.2%	5.2%	6.50%	
D Number of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants with care experience	16	16	18	22	20	29	31			33	Accept
Proportion of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants with care experience	0.7%	0.7%	0.8%	0.9%	0.9%	1.2%	1.3%	1.2%	1.2%	1.20%	
E Number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first year entrants	1,974	1,919	1,952	2,101	2,183						Estimated performance 19/20 - 91.3%. Business Plan and Outcome Agreement target = 92%. Accept
Number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first year entrants returning to study in year 2	1,818	1,779	1,813	1,962	2,016						
Proportion of Scottish-domiciled full-time first year entrants returning to study in year 2	92.1%	92.7%	92.9%	93.4%	92.3%			92.3%	92.3%		
F The difference (+/-) from the individual institution benchmark figure for students satisfied with the overall quality of their course of study in the National Student Survey	1	1	3	2	5.5	8.2	8.2	5.5	5.5		Business Plan target = 89%. If benchmark remains at 81.75%, this would give +7.75% above benchmark. Accept
G1 The number of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey				1,029							Business Plan target is 97%, propose this rather than 98.2%
The proportion of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey in a positive destination				1,010							
The number of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey in a positive destination				98.2%				98.2%	0.0%		
G2 The number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey in employment				831							Accept
The number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey in employment in professional employment				585							
The proportion of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey in employment in professional employment				70.4%				70.4%	0.0%		
H Number of Scottish-domiciled Undergraduate Qualifiers	1,948	2,080	1,982	1,939	2,089	1,973		2,089	2,089		New item, cannot replicate data



Annexe A

Annexe A

**University
Innovation Fund
Plan 2020-21 →**

Introduction

As highlighted throughout our Outcome Agreement (OA), we are committed to delivering on the Scottish Government's strategic priorities set out in its Economic Strategy. The support received through the University Innovation Fund (UIF), and particularly its enhanced contribution in 2018/19, has allowed us to strengthen our internal and external-facing innovation infrastructure and take a more proactive approach as we engage with industry, community and the public sector.

This change has been reflected in our strategy (revised December 2018), with economic development now featuring as one of our four key priorities: 'To stimulate economic development and support businesses to be more successful' and our mission stating: 'To transform people and communities by providing demand-led teaching and research to contribute to economic, social and cultural development regionally, nationally and internationally'.

The RGU UIF plan 2020/21 was completed in early 2020, before the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic was realised. Given the significance of the impact on the economy and society and our rapid and consistent response to supporting those most affected, it is helpful to revise the plan at this mid-year point.

In the months leading up to July 2020, we developed an institutional industry-informed approach to help identify and plan for future university developments. This was done by reviewing the opportunities and threats faced by key sectors prioritised by the UK and Scottish governments and

already supported by our Business Development Managers. This review was undertaken in consultation with businesses, industry bodies, regional and national development and government organisations, by reviewing key strategic economic reports, and through a number of regional skills and industry partnership groups established either to address the impact of the pandemic or to further strategic developments.

The output from the sectoral review was assessed against our capabilities and from this, two priority sectors were identified along with three underpinning themes of strategic importance across most sectors. A plan was developed for each of these sectors and themes and the first output was to produce an upskilling short course development schedule with delivery starting during the lockdown. This approach was shared with and received positively by the Scottish Government cross-party working group for universities and colleges in November 2020.

This industry-informed approach is now the backdrop to our strategic and planning framework and is evidenced through some of our work in the first six months of the year as illustrated below against each UIF outcome. The document also provides a plan update for the remainder of 2020/21.

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.

- We have a strong reputation for business engagement and undertaking industry relevant teaching and research and this is reflected in our employability figures and consistently high performance in rankings that recognise such activity, including becoming Scottish University of the Year 2021.
- Due to the economic downturn in the region in the years prior to 2019, we had focused our business activity internationally. In 2019/20, RGU increased our focus on regional and national engagement, working with enterprise agencies and other key organisations to maximise opportunities for local business and public organisations. To implement this effectively, our business development managers took a sector-orientated, consultative approach, rather than being school based, with the aim of increasing demand and simplifying services.
- These changes in approach during 2019/20, supported by the UIF, were hugely important for when we considered how we could best support organisations during the pandemic and be on the front foot when restrictions are lifted.
- Our main approach to supporting businesses during lockdown was

very clear - to focus on government supported mechanisms such as Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, Innovation Vouchers, Graduate Apprenticeships and Innovation Centres. This approach was taken as the programmes were already established with clear application routes; they require a lower financial investment from participating companies; the programmes are promoted nationally by partner organisations; and they enable the application of innovative solutions to address challenges that most companies faced during, and as a result of, the pandemic. This approach was recognised through an invitation to provide thought leadership pieces in the national media including the Scotsman and Press & Journal, a presentation to the Scottish Government Cross Party Group for Universities and Colleges, and a number of blogs including for Interface, the SFC and the SCDI.

- Despite the pandemic, this activity stimulated demand as evidenced by us securing 32 Innovation Vouchers with company partners since the start of the pandemic until at time of writing in January 2021. Our projects were awarded 30% of all Innovation Vouchers awarded in Scotland in 19/20.
- Despite the pandemic and a further local lockdown in Aberdeen in August 2020, we also increased our engagement with businesses through the Graduate Apprenticeship (GA) scheme, securing a further 161 GAs in

September 2020 and building on the relationships generated over three years of GA delivery. We have now secured over 260 GA collaboration agreements with companies, all of which signify a collaborative relationship with potential for further development.

- To maintain our relationships with, and provide additional support for, businesses and organisations, we launched RGU Knowledge Bites for Business in August 2020. The initiative provides free online access to insights from the RGU Community through a series of one-hour webinars, videos and thought leadership articles – all of which are recorded and can be accessed from the RGU website. Over 1,000 people joined these webinars between August and December 2020.
- We also continued to participate in large regional initiatives, particularly in the area of energy transition, to meet the demands of industry and address the region’s economic development needs. This was exemplified in 2019 by the region’s Strength in Places bid, which was submitted through our partnership with Opportunity North East (ONE) and the University of Aberdeen. Although the bid was not successful, it was very positively received, and in 2020 the content and structures were used as part of the region’s Energy Transition Zone application to the UK and Scottish Government, led by ONE. This bid will be further developed through 2021.

- Unfortunately the proposed National Subsea Centre building development and launch, due in Summer 2020, was significantly delayed due to the pandemic. It is now hoped that the Centre, developed in partnership with OGTC, will launch in Summer 2021. A key focus for 2020/21 will be to grow the Centre’s impact and reputation for world- class subsea research, addressing the demands of energy transition and in parallel grow our industry-relevant research capability and capacity in this area. This focus is supported through the thought leadership provided by the RGU Energy Transition Institute.

In 2020/21, our main focus for will be to:

- develop the National Subsea Centre;
- secure £1m of knowledge exchange awards;
- secure 2000 individual engagements from over 20 countries through RGU Knowledge Bites for Business.

Outcome 2 (Simplification/ Commercialisation): In partnership with Enterprise Agencies and Interface and others demonstrably simplify business access to knowledge and expertise in Scottish universities.

- We simplify access to knowledge and expertise by aligning with key government supported initiatives and mechanisms and in the way we conduct business directly with industry. This has become particularly important in supporting companies through the pandemic

and a key focus for our external communications.

- One area of focus for the recently established role of Associate Vice-Principal of Business and Economic Development is to help simplify business access to services by ensuring alignment of operational activity to our strategic aim: “To stimulate economic development and support businesses to be more successful”. This development is supported by the fact that 24 of the 30 BAED staff are now industry-facing, supporting companies through the full sales cycle and beyond.
- In order to improve business accessibility, we take a consultative approach with companies and works on a sectoral basis. This was intensified during the pandemic to ensure that we could identify and support the different challenges faced by different sectors. Consultation was undertaken with businesses, trade associations, enterprise agencies, SDS, Interface, ONE, Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce, local and national government, NESCoL, universities, and other organisations as appropriate. This work also fed into the creation of our institutional industry-informed approach to identify and plan for future developments.
- Critical to supporting the successful interface with industry is ensuring that back-room systems and processes are streamlined and effective. In 2019/20, all business-related processes, authorisations

and templates were reviewed, and these have been rolled-out through 2020/21. This included a new IP Commercialisation Policy launched in December 2020 which integrated consultancy, spin-outs and other forms of IP commercialisation with oversight and direction from an IP Commercialisation Executive. Through this review, we also agreed to commit fully to the KE Concordat – principles and development, thereby ensuring we develop an effective framework for continuous improvement.

- Prior to lockdown we hosted staff from both Interface and the North of Scotland KTP office, helping to raise the profile of these support mechanisms with business. Although each organisation has been working from home during lockdown, the representatives continue to meet with us regularly. Following a successful secondment to Interface, a member of BAED staff took on the new role of Knowledge Exchange Manager, significantly increasing engagement with businesses and resulting in continued growth in our knowledge exchange metrics.
- Although knowledge exchange mechanisms provide excellent support to companies cross-sector, to engage more fully with larger industrial strategy challenges, we have worked closely with colleagues through RCDG and will be dedicating resource to increase our involvement from February 2021.
- In 2019, our Oil & Gas Institute became the RGU Energy Transition Institute, recognising the change in

focus in the region and nationally. This, along with the soon-to-be launched National Subsea Centre has provided a gateway for industry to access our expertise and facilities, including our world-class simulation suite.

In 2020/21, our main focus will be to:

- increase the breadth and depth of knowledge exchange awards to include:
 - breadth - 20 SFC Innovation Vouchers and 2 Advanced Innovation Vouchers
 - depth - increased follow-on activity through KTPs, Innovation Centres or consultancy
 - refine KE processes through the development of a KE Concordat plan;
- develop the business section of our website to become a resource-rich portal.

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)

We are committed to partnering with other universities and enterprise agencies to promote greater innovation and enhance enterprise in the Economy and recognises that this is of particular importance given the impacts of the pandemic and energy transition, and the lead-up to COP26.

We took advantage of opportunities to write thought leadership pieces for national media focussing on the pivotal role of education in support of economic recovery. In addition to these features, we recently contributed blogs to the SCDI and Interface websites and will seek to develop these opportunities further in the remaining six months of 2020/21.

Together with ONE, the University of Aberdeen, the OGTC and other key players, we will continue to implement the Aberdeen City Region Deal and our investment in innovation, internationalisation, digital connectivity and infrastructure across the region as these areas will be particularly important as the country seeks to recover and build a stronger, fairer and greener economic future.

We continue to deliver a national agenda, through active participation in collaborative regional initiatives in areas such as energy transition, innovation and health.

In energy transition, we work particularly closely with ONE, OGTC, the Councils and the University of Aberdeen to support the region’s economic development through skills and technology initiatives and through the RGU/OGTC National Subsea Centre.

To promote greater innovation in the economy, we work in partnership with Aberdeenshire Council and with support from LEADER rural development funds, developed the Library Innovation Network Aberdeenshire (LINA) network. LINA was developed to encourage and support rural entrepreneurship and rural economic development and growth. The project utilised library facilities,

enabling people to meet and develop their entrepreneurial skills and innovative ideas right on their doorstep. Through lockdown this was delivered wholly online and completed in December 2020. Due to the success of the project, we are now collaborating with Aberdeenshire Council to deliver two new programmes through the “No-one Left Behind” employability funding scheme – LINA+ Enterprise Booster for 16-24 year olds and LINA+ Women in Business.

We are increasingly working with health and social care organisations, including the NHS and third-sector organisations, to address the long-term impact of the pandemic. Examples include our partnership with Aberdeen City Council and University of Aberdeen to consider health inequalities and our collaboration with the NHS and University of Aberdeen to apply research to address NHS challenges.

In 2020/21, our main focus will be to build on the initiatives noted above:

- partnerships such as those with ONE, the Councils and the Chamber of Commerce to encourage innovation in the region as it transitions from its dependency on the oil and gas sector;
- LINA and other initiatives to promote innovation to the wider community regionally and nationally;
- Partnerships with NHS, the Councils and the third-sector to address the medium and long-term impacts of the pandemic on service users and providers.

Outcome 4 (entrepreneurialism): Sector will have made significant positive change in the way entrepreneurial opportunities are promoted and delivered to students, staff and businesses

We will continue to stimulate and foster an entrepreneurial community throughout the university and the region, led by our Entrepreneurship and Innovation Group (EIG). Although this will see the continued development of a number of key initiatives throughout 2020/21, delivery for entrepreneurialism has had to undergo a complete transformation for students, staff and businesses due to the pandemic. Despite this, our activity and support for start-ups has continued to run effectively, with a move to online delivery for all activity and a focus on supporting entrepreneurial students, staff and graduates to be responsive, creative and resilient.

Recognising our achievements in this area, we were the only Scottish university nominated for the Times Higher Education ‘Outstanding Entrepreneurial University of the Year’ award 2020. This was on the back of us being awarded the Herald’s Higher Education Award for Outstanding Engagement with Business in 2019. Developments for 2020/21 are noted below.

The RGU Startup Accelerator program for staff, students and our alumni and that of NESCoI, supported by the Wood Foundation, was launched in late 2018. In Q4 2019/20, RGU’s third annual Accelerator program went fully online, culminating in a showcase “Start-up Sunday LIVE” event which included a key address from Ivan McKee, Minister for Trade, Investment and Innovation.

The online event has been viewed nearly 4,000 times from as far afield as Mexico and Japan. Teams from the 2019/20 cohort have gone on to win national awards including from Converge and Scottish Edge, with one company, Knit-it, being awarded a Young Innovators Award from Innovate UK and the Princes Trust – one of only five awarded to Scottish entrepreneurs. The 2020/21 Accelerator has evolved to address key challenges society faces due to the pandemic, with a greater focus on health and social care. The structured programme, which is fully online, will commence in February 2021.

In response to COVID-19 and the significant challenges facing our 2020 graduates, we launched an Entrepreneurship Summer School to assist those considering self-employment. Thirty three graduates completed the four-week online programme and were awarded an ‘RGU Enterprise Enhancement award’. The programme content is now available for all students and alumni. The Summer School will run again in June/July 2021.

We also recognised student innovation in mitigating the effects of the pandemic in July 2020 through two new prizes, the ‘Innovative Idea’ prize and the ‘Inspirational Student’ prize, supported by the RGU Foundation. These recognised our inspiring and innovative students making a positive impact during the pandemic. Over 55 entries were received, and five students won cash prizes of £500 each for their work which ranged from creating volunteering groups, to fundraising for educational books on race and equality for schools, to making audio versions of theatre productions.

We became the first and only university in Scotland to be given Scottish Innovative Student Award (SISA) self-accreditation status from the Scottish Institute for Enterprise (SIE). EIG worked with academics to embed the award in the curriculum, resulting in over 470 students completing the award (37% of all of Scotland’s award winners). In recognition of our work during the pandemic, we won the University Team Award from the Scottish Institute for Enterprise Imaginative Educator Awards 2020. Notification was received in January 2021 that SIE will cease and we are now considering how to respond.

We made use of some of the 2019/20 SFC Upskilling Fund to support two sectors facing particular challenge from the pandemic:

- EIG, Look Again and Gray’s School of Art designed and delivered a creative entrepreneurship programme supporting micro-businesses and freelancers. The 15-credit programme was delivered to 35 creative individuals and went fully online in response to the pandemic. Building on the success, further cohorts will commence in March and June 2021.
- We co-designed a 15-credit course with NHS Grampian, ‘Leading Strategic Innovation in Health & Social Care’, and piloting this with a cohort of NHS managers.

To promote greater innovation in the economy, in partnership with Aberdeenshire Council and with support from LEADER rural development funds, we developed the Library Innovation Network Aberdeenshire (LINA) network.

LINA was developed to encourage and support rural entrepreneurship and rural economic development and growth. The project utilised library facilities, enabling people to meet and develop their entrepreneurial skills and innovative ideas right on their doorstep. Through lockdown this was delivered wholly online and completed in December 2020. Due to the success of the project, the university is now collaborating with Aberdeenshire Council to deliver two new programmes in 2020/21 through the “No-one Left Behind” employability funding scheme – LINA+ Enterprise Booster for 16-24 year olds and LINA+ Women in Business.

In 2021/22, the main focus for the university will be to:

- deliver the 2021 Innovation Accelerator and continue to support 2019 and 2020 accelerator start-ups to thrive;
- deliver two further cohorts of the Creative Entrepreneurship programme and work with other institutions to consider potential roll-out;
- Close-out the LINA project and design and deliver LINA+ Enterprise Booster for 16-24 year olds and LINA+ Women in Business.

**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**

We will continue to work closely with the Scottish Government, SDI, Department for International Trade (DIT), the

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and others to maximise opportunities for the Scottish economy, internationally, thereby supporting the actions set out in the Enterprise and Skills Review and addressing the Scottish Government’s “Scotland: A Trading Nation” and in cognisance of “Scotland’s Vision for Trade” published in January 2021. We will continue to work with partners to access opportunities in key international regions and support Scotland plc to trade on an international stage.

We have a significant track record of working internationally, as recognised in our DIT Board of Trade nomination in 2018 – the only Scottish university to be recognised in such a way. This was consolidated in 2019 when we received the award for Top Education and Training Provider at the international Get Energy conference in London.

However, as with any organisation involved in internationalisation, we have had to reconsider how we do business, given travel restrictions and as countries have all been at different stages of the pandemic throughout 2020/21.

We increased activity with our TNE partners in Switzerland and Sri Lanka to support them to continue to teach and assess students, despite the pandemic. We will continue to build new partnership opportunities capitalising on our Scottish University of the Year 2021 status, with a view to these starting in 2022.

Despite travel not being possible and a greater focus on supporting regional economic recovery, we have maintained and further developed our strategic relationships internationally. It has not

been possible to deliver some of the major programmes secured but other, and different, activity has continued with established partners:

- The British Council - we secured an award of over £200k to fund female students from Latin America to study STEM subjects at RGU in 2021/22;
- UNAM, Mexico City - building on the strategic relationship developed and captured through a signing of an MoU and the securing of a Newton Fund programme between both universities in February 2020, teams representing business, research and entrepreneurship from both institutions, collaborated online to share best practice in terms of commercialising research;
- Trinidad and Tobago Energy Ministry and DIT - we will deliver an online renewable energy law programme for the Trinidad and Tobago government for the third year and this will be extended to include the Guyana government;
- Kobe City Government - we previously hosted students from Kobe City on offshore energy summer schools, and will now deliver a new online programme in February 2021 capturing some of the key components of the summer programme.

We are currently developing and piloting a new model for working internationally, in consultation with a number of national organisations and if successful, this will be rolled-out in 2021/22. We also support inward investment through the Associate

Vice Principal's position on the Invest Aberdeen Project Board and Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce Policy Council, and by aligning activity to "Scotland's Inward Investment Plan: Shaping Scotland's Economy".

In 2020/21, our main focus will be to:

- develop a new international plan in consideration of energy transition and the long term implications of COVID-19, which will include the assessment of a new model of conducting business internationally;
- convert an opportunity in one country where we have established relationships; build relations and secure new opportunities in a country where we already do business; and build prospects within two new country markets.

Outcome 6 (inclusive growth and social impact): Scale up support of the Scottish Government's ambitions for inclusive growth

Through our strategic framework, we articulate our commitment to "Prioritise Societal and Economic Impact". We do this by actively supporting economic development in its widest sense, and the relationships between health, wellbeing, social resilience, culture, and prosperity. This includes our representation on a number of boards and regional groups relating to these themes. This commitment is even more critical due to the impact of the pandemic on communities and additionally within the region, the impact of energy transition and a diversification from oil and gas on the region.

The following four case studies illustrate our work in this area:

1. Streetsport, funded through the Denis Law Legacy Trust, delivers a range of sports programmes to young people, where there are hotspots of anti-social behaviour or areas of deprivation in Aberdeen. Prior to the pandemic, Streetsport was engaging with over 15,000 young people a year, specialising in supporting young people to be the best they can be by engaging them in sports sessions and then giving them a platform to improve their lives. Participants then progress on to becoming volunteers and joining an employability programme. Streetsport also runs prevention programmes in primary schools, employability programmes and an innovative new programme supporting young people affected by imprisonment and supervises provision on Scotland's first Cruyff Court, the Cruyff Court Denis Law.

During lockdown, Streetsport had to put the majority of their programmes on hold, however, they continued to support the community through initiatives such as: delivering over 500,000 pieces of essential PPE to care homes using the Streetsport vans; delivering over 500 food parcels to people living in isolation; providing in-school support for over 100 vulnerable children and children of key workers per week; and holding numerous online craft, dancing and baking activities and events for young people who would normally participate in the sports programmes including providing them with the kits to allow them to join in. The team

also raised £12,400 worth of food and electricity vouchers which they then distributed amongst families in areas of deprivation.

Streetsport have been recognised for their outstanding work in the community via a National Pride of Sport award and through Streetsport, we were the only university to win a Queens Award for Voluntary Services. Streetsport were also recognised for their response to the pandemic through a number of additional awards in 2020: National Streetgames Awards - "Best Mental Health and Wellbeing programme"; Aberdeen's Champions - "Sport and Wellbeing Champion"; Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce "Northern Lights" awards - Finalist in the "Making a difference" category (winner to be announced in March 2021).

The focus for 2020/21 will be recovery and rebuilding trusting relationships with the young people engaged on the programmes as well as getting the sports programme back up and running. In Q4 of 2020, some sessions attracted almost record numbers of participants showing the vital need for this service for young people. The entire Streetsport team is currently being trained in mental health support, in anticipation for an increase in the number of disclosure cases due to many services not being fully operational or overloaded.

2. The Look Again Festival emerged from the 'Creating a New North' report as our public engagement initiative, to actively support and spotlight the region's culture, heritage and creative

identity. Now embedded within Gray's School of Art, it is supported by local and national funders to lead on developing the creative industries in the region through a range of activities. In response to the pandemic, the Look Again team played a pivotal role in supporting the creative industries and RGU students. An example of this was the rapid delivery of the annual degree show, which was delivered virtually through a fully immersive 3D environment, using cutting edge coding and technology which enabled students to showcase their work through a global platform – all of which was developed under nine weeks. Work is now being undertaken in 2020/21 to assess the potential for a second virtual degree show and assessing how to maximise the accessibility and reach. The aim of the showcase, partially funded by the UIF, was to encourage student entrepreneurialism and provide easier access to the university to the wider public. This was evidenced through over 10,000 visitors to the site, from all over the world. Due to its success, the team have been recognised through a number of local awards with two further awards in the pipeline. They were also selected by CHEAD (representative body for the art and design higher education sector) as part of their Creative Resilience: Art Adapts, to provide a video case study as an example of best practice in supporting the creative industries, during the pandemic. We also presented our other activities at the CHEAD Creative Resilience event.

In 2020, Look Again collaborated with Gray's School of Art and EIG to deliver two cohorts of a creative entrepreneurship programme, delivered fully online, to support micro-businesses and freelancers, recognising the particular difficulties and challenges faced by the sector. Building on the success, further cohorts will commence in March and June 2021.

In 2020/21 Look Again will continue to work in collaboration with other key partners, such as the Aberdeen Art Gallery and Creative Scotland. In December 2020 they launched the Create Networks programme, funded through Creative Scotland, to develop networks and training opportunities for the creative industries throughout Aberdeenshire, Orkney and Shetland and this activity will continue through 2020/21. Opportunities are also being considered for our Mobile Art School initiative, an outreach project, aimed at engaging and connecting schools across Aberdeen and beyond, to improve the awareness and understanding of the creative industries as a viable career option.

3. We have been working with other universities to support business and industry and economic and social development in the Highlands and Islands across a range of industry sectors. With HIE, Orkney Islands Council, UHI and Heriot Watt University, we have been building engagement in the Orkney Islands and helping to lay a foundation for additional investment in the region through the islands deal. We have led the development and

submission of two Strategic Outline Business Cases to Scottish and UK Governments, as part of the islands deal, one for delivery of a smart mobility project and another focusing on entrepreneurship as part of the TalEntEd project. We are also engaged in other collaborative projects for the direct benefit of the people, society and businesses of Orkney. This engagement is represented in there now being 23 students in Orkney pursuing our Graduate Apprenticeship degrees in their workplace.

4. We are collaborating with local partners to address health inequalities in the region. An example is our collaboration with the Torry Development Trust and Grampian Housing Association which will bring together expertise in health and social care, architecture and the creative arts, to inform and design the regeneration of the former Victoria Road School in Torry, Aberdeen. We received planning approval in June 2020 and this project will be a focus for 2020/21. The regeneration project will provide an innovative and sustainable housing development and learning centre for the community of Torry and bring together professional disciplines from across the university to work in collaboration with the Torry Development Trust. The initiative involves students working in interprofessional groups for the benefit of the community by taking an approach, which focuses on the positive impact of health and wellbeing on daily life. Further funding and development of this initiative will be a key focus for 2020/21. We are

also collaborating with local councils, the University of Aberdeen and third-sector organisations, including VSA, to explore projects which will address health and social care challenges and inequalities throughout 2021.

In 2020/21, our main focus will be to:

- deliver on the initiatives case studied above while considering other opportunities to support communities as they recover from the pandemic;
- attract investment to increase the impact of our engagement in the community and society.

**Outcome 7 (equality & diversity):
Ensure positive promotion of equality and diversity in staff and all who are affected by the use of UIF**

We will continue to ensure that our activities in support of UIF outcomes reflect our commitment to advancing equality and diversity. We are committed to building an inclusive working and learning environment and promoting the importance of equality and diversity through its activities.

Our two core policies in this area, the Equality & Diversity Policy and the Dignity at Work & Study Policy will both be reviewed this year to ensure that the recommendations of the Equality & Human Rights Commission (EHRC) report on tackling racial harassment are implemented along with best practice in relation to Gender Based Violence. An Impact Assessment undertaken as part of our policy review process, will include the impact on UIF activities.

We have further strengthened our approach to equality and diversity with the creation of a new governance structure which will follow a formal committee format through an Equality and Diversity Forum, feeding into a Equality and Diversity Sub Committee which will then feed into established university committees. The sub-committee will advise and make recommendations to the Executive on matters relating to the promotion and monitoring of equality and diversity issues throughout the university. We also encourage staff and students to take personal responsibility in positively promoting equality and diversity by becoming equality and diversity champions through initiatives such as the Women's Network.

We carry out a range of awareness raising activities on different protected characteristics across the year, including International Women's Day, Scottish Interfaith Week, Black History Month and LGBT history month. We are a member of the Athena SWAN Charter and committed to the aims and principles of Athena SWAN in promoting gender equality.

We continue to address the gender pay gap through biennial reviews of attraction and retention premiums, addressing historic pay arrangements and including gender neutral language through recruitment processes. We also continue to implement best practice to ensure all staff have the opportunity to progress, regardless of their personal circumstances. This is a consideration for any UIF activities.

Although not directly related to our own staff, we have been recognised as a leader in this area through our engagement with external organisations. We have been commissioned by OGUK's Diversity and Inclusion Taskforce to undertake a survey on diversity and inclusion in the energy sector to be launched in March 2021. We are also partnering with a major company to identify recruitment and retention best practice to secure a diverse workforce, through an RGU student innovation event.

In 2020/21, our main focus will be to:

- increase unconscious bias training to more staff involved in recruitment and selection to deliver a fair and equal recruitment process;
- deliver two major diversity and inclusion studies with external partners.

Interim Outcome Agreement 2020 - 21

