

# ABERDEEN 2040

open to all and dedicated to the pursuit  
of truth in the service of others

1495



UNIVERSITY OF  
ABERDEEN

CELEBRATING  
525 YEARS  
1495 – 2020





Our ambitious new strategy charts the direction of the University of Aberdeen for the next 20 years. We focus on four strategic themes, which define the kind of University we want to be: **Inclusive, Interdisciplinary, International** and **Sustainable**.

Staff and students have worked together to identify innovative concepts and actions which will drive our future success. This strategy also responds to five interdisciplinary challenges. These are areas of activity where our University can make a significant impact on the world around us:

- **Health, nutrition and wellbeing**
- **Social inclusion and cultural diversity**
- **Energy transition**
- **Data and artificial intelligence**
- **Environment and biodiversity.**

The University's international outreach and appeal continue to grow. We also maintain our commitment to supporting our region and our nation to thrive and succeed. In the years ahead, we will remain adaptable and responsive to changes in the world around us, to ensure that we deliver the highest quality of teaching and research, and that we continue to fulfil our foundational purpose.

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| <b>Cecilia Wallbäck</b><br>Student President | <b>Professor George Boyne</b><br>Principal & Vice-Chancellor | <b>Esther Robertson</b><br>Senior Governor |
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# Our Purpose

Since 1495, the University of Aberdeen has been **open to all and dedicated to the pursuit of truth in the service of others**. We still have that purpose. It defines our actions and underpins our ethos. We achieve our purpose through excellence in our core activities of education and research, which transforms the world around us.

We are the fifth oldest university in the English-speaking world. Established to serve the north-east of Scotland, our university is a global presence in higher education. A dual focus on our region and the wider world is as important to us today as it was five centuries ago. We welcome others with respect, and work with them in trust. We value freedom of thought and integrity of action.

Our foundational purpose continues to be our driving force. We are open to all, locally, nationally and internationally, and our pursuit of truth is shaped by our determination to act in the service of others.

What does this mean for our future?

# Our Education

The University of Aberdeen has a distinctive, flexible curriculum that encourages students to grow as independent learners. True to our roots as an ancient Scottish university, our degree programmes combine breadth and depth, and draw their strength from the quality of our research. We believe in the interconnectedness of research and teaching, and will create new interdisciplinary pathways for study as we address global challenges. Students and the Students' Association will work together with staff to ensure that our curriculum and our student experience are among the very best in the world.

We will prepare our graduates to thrive in the diverse workplaces of the future by working with external partners and alumni. We will develop more challenge-led teaching, which enables students to learn by tackling real-world problems. We will provide more work-based learning, through placements and volunteering. We will make innovative use of digital technology to enable learning, and equip our graduates with digital skills. We will foster their intellectual development, creative thinking, innovation and entrepreneurship. Our students will grow in confidence and understanding, so that they can be change-makers across the globe.

Our education is open to all. We will provide an environment in which all students can achieve success, whatever their background or personal characteristics. We will support our students through effective teamwork across the university. We will set ambitious targets for widening access, working with our education partners to support aspiration and attainment. We will expand learning on demand and continuing professional development. Our education will be available to people wherever they wish to learn with us, and at any stage in their career journey.



# Our Research

Throughout the centuries, researchers at the University of Aberdeen have generated new insights in medicine, science and engineering, law, social sciences, arts and humanities. Our work has earned many honours and awards, and has contributed to five Nobel prizes.

Like our education, our research will be intellectually rigorous. Whether working within our established areas of excellence, or developing interdisciplinary approaches that generate new methods of inquiry, we will tackle theoretical and practical problems. We will generate new knowledge and will connect and combine ideas, addressing economic and societal issues with ambition and imagination.

Our research will be globally excellent and locally relevant. To ensure this, we will engage with our external partners as we plan for the future, and will work collaboratively with them both on and off campus. Our research will be open to all. We will work to share our findings, and to promote open access to academic resources for anyone who wishes to learn. Our research will have impact on our world, and will inform our curriculum, shaping what and how we teach. We will train and support the next generation of researchers, equipping them with the skills they need to develop their expertise and to engage with the challenges of the future.



# Strategic Themes

**Over the next 20 years, four themes will shape our learning, discovery and strategic actions.**

## ***Inclusive***

We welcome and support students, staff and partners from all backgrounds, organisations and communities. We value diversity.

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## ***International***

We connect with others, and extend our networks and partnerships around the world. We think across borders.

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## ***Interdisciplinary***

We innovate in education and research by generating, sharing and applying new kinds of knowledge. We learn together.

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## ***Sustainable***

We understand and nurture our environment, and take care of our resources, including our people and our finances. We work responsibly.

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In these pages, we set out 20 commitments across these four themes. We will address five great challenges of our age. As the digital revolution brings new opportunities, and the climate emergency threatens us all, we commit to delivering outstanding education and research that will shape the lives of our students, and tackle the pressing problems of our world.





# Inclusive

## We value diversity

Our university is open to all. We will welcome staff and students of all backgrounds, and will connect with our communities and partners, locally, nationally and internationally. Our commitment to inclusion will guide our education, our research, and the projects we deliver. We aspire to lead our sector in promoting health and wellbeing, and celebrating diversity.

Our approach acknowledges intersectionality. We recognise that each of us has many characteristics that combine to make up our lived experience. We will deliver high-quality support, relevant to individual needs. We will enhance our buildings and our services to make them more accessible, and we will continually improve our digital infrastructure and systems to enable everyone to learn and research effectively.

We will also look outwards and build partnerships with individuals, communities and organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

## *We will*

1. care for the wellbeing, health and safety of our diverse community, supporting and developing our people to achieve their full potential
2. encourage widening access to study, by having fair and flexible entry routes, offering diverse qualifications, and providing a range of modes of delivery; our students will be able to succeed whatever their personal and social background
3. develop a research portfolio that promotes national and international collaboration with stakeholders, including companies, organisations and governments
4. secure the highest standards of equality, diversity and inclusion, achieving accreditation across multiple strands and characteristics
5. eliminate pay gaps across all protected characteristics



# Interdisciplinary

## We learn together

Our university will be a vibrant network of people – students, staff and partners – working across internal structures and geographical boundaries. We will celebrate our disciplinary strengths, and we will collaborate between subject areas to develop creative solutions to practical and societal problems.

Our dynamic educational and research environment will be greater than the sum of its parts. By sharing our theories, concepts, data and expertise, we will explore and create new fields of knowledge. We will build synergies across teaching areas and research groupings, and will use emerging methods and technologies to ask new questions and make new discoveries.

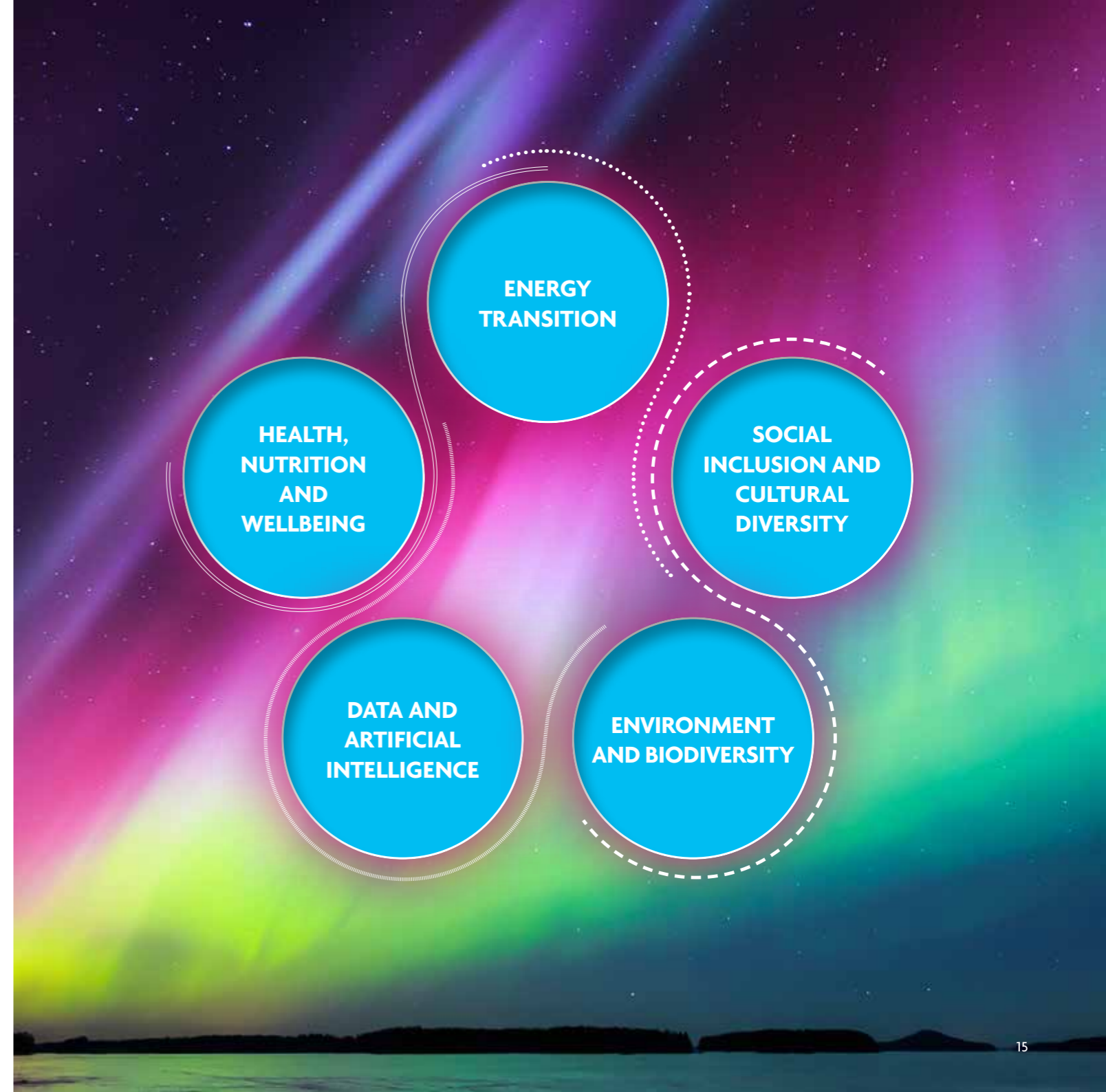
## We will

6. support a learning culture in which all our staff and students can exchange ideas and expertise across intellectual areas and organisational structures
7. design new courses and programmes which encourage interdisciplinary learning, and ensure that all our students can experience innovative, challenge-led education involving external stakeholders
8. build networks across our community to foster interdisciplinary interactions between our subject research strengths, using and sharing expertise to drive new understanding
9. listen to and work with external stakeholders regionally and globally to build partnerships that deliver imaginative solutions to societal and industrial challenges
10. develop our digital systems and enhance our buildings to create virtual and physical spaces that enable interdisciplinary exchange and innovation

# Our Interdisciplinary Challenges

Our pursuit of truth is grounded in the service of others. Working together, we will address five interdisciplinary challenges of our time. These urgent and wide-ranging problems require complex solutions, which draw on both theoretical and applied knowledge.

We have the expertise to face these particular challenges, which speak directly to our region, our society and our century. We will engage with them collaboratively, combining ideas and approaches across our areas of excellence. As we work, we will also look ahead and identify new challenges for the future.







# International

## We think across borders

We are a Scottish university that was founded with international connections. We are open to people and ideas from around the world. Whether in Aberdeen or in Qatar, we welcome students and staff from all nations. Through outreach and the exchange of ideas, we will teach and research across borders. We already rank among the best for our global outlook. We will continue to expand our networks and partnerships, and seek new opportunities for international and intercultural exchange.

We will provide mechanisms and support for more staff and students to have an international experience. We will offer more transnational education, enabling learning across the globe with key partners. We will work tirelessly in the service of others to deliver international impacts by addressing the challenges facing our world.

## *We will*

11. provide an international education to learners from all around the world, becoming a more diverse and multicultural community
12. equip our graduates for global employment through our curriculum and teaching methods
13. harness our research expertise to form partnerships and networks around the world to meet the challenges of our age
14. ensure all our students can have an international experience, by studying abroad or working collaboratively with international partners
15. develop our campuses and processes to create a caring environment that is alert to cultural differences



# Sustainable

## We work responsibly

We will show leadership in working for the sustainable future of our planet, setting an example to our sector and to society. We will evaluate all our actions for their impact on the environment, and will meet stretching standards and targets. We will also use our resources wisely, plan ahead and secure new sources of income to ensure our university's financial sustainability.

Our research will benefit our world, addressing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the climate emergency, and energy transition to a net zero carbon economy. We will also contribute to the prosperity of our region and the civic life of Aberdeen, working for the good of the area which we were founded to serve. We will prepare our students to be responsible citizens, inspired to

make a real difference through their actions and their leadership.

To fulfil our purpose, our university must be financially sustainable. Our education and research will be designed to be of high value. We will seek new income sources, growing our postgraduate and online teaching, and attracting research funding from a wider range of sources. We will preserve the heritage of our buildings, and will enhance our digital and physical environments to serve staff and students, and to inspire creativity and excellence.

## *We will*

16. encourage everyone within our community to work and live sustainably, recognising the importance of our time, energy and resilience
17. educate all our students and staff to be leaders in protecting the environment
18. excel in research that addresses the climate emergency, enables energy transition and the preservation of biodiversity
19. achieve net zero carbon emissions before 2040
20. generate resources for investment in education and research year on year, so that we can continue to develop the people, ideas and actions that help us to fulfil our purpose

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This document is available online and in alternative formats.

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