UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

Tuesday, 22 November 2022

THE FOLLOWING PAPERS HAVE BEEN WITHHELD ON THE GROUNDS OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

3.2   Minutes of Closed Sessions held on 4 October 2022

8.2   Finance Report: 2022/23 – Position and Projection

8.3   Going Concern Report

8.4   Financing Report for Year End 31 July 2022 (withheld pending final external auditor approval and will be published on the Court website thereafter)

8.5   Annual Report and Accounts for Year End 31 July 2022 (withheld pending final external auditor approval and will be published on the University Finance website thereafter)

8.6   External Auditor's Report & Representation Letter

8.7   Audit and Risk Committee Report to Court and Annual Report

8.8   Internal Auditor's Annual Report

THE FOLLOWING PAPERS HAVE BEEN REDACTED ON THE GROUNDS OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

5.2   REF Action Plan and Investment: Paragraph 7.1

8.1   Student Intake, Student Population and Budgetary Impact 2022/23 – Sections 4.7- 4.12 and 6.9-6.14 and Appendix 3.

13.2   Finance and Resourcing Committee Report: Section (6.2-6.4)

There will be a meeting of the **UNIVERSITY COURT** on **Tuesday 22 November 2022** at 9am to 3pm in the **Science Teaching Hub.**

BUSINESS

All items of business are for discussion, providing information or context relevant for current or future decisions. Those items that require a decision today are annotated accordingly.

| 1 | 9am | WELCOME AND RECTOR'S REPORT | (enclosed) |

| 2 | 9.05am | DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REMINDER OF COURT AND MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES | (enclosed) |

3   9.05am   MINUTES:
3.1   Minutes of Meeting held on 4 October 2022: For Approval   (enclosed)
3.2   Minutes of Closed Business Sessions held on 4 October 2022: For Approval
Strictly Confidential to Court Members   (enclosed)

4   9.10am   ACTION LOG, MATTERS ARISING AND DECISIONS BY CIRCULATION
(enclosed)

5   9.15am   DEEP DIVE SESSION: REF ACTION PLAN AND UPDATES FROM STRATEGY MEETING
5.1   Verbal Updates on Progress on Planning Assumptions for Growth by 2030, Employability and External Engagement (10 minutes)
5.2   REF Action Plan and Investment (Part Confidential) (50 minutes) (enclosed)

6   10.00am   REPORT FROM THE SENIOR GOVERNOR   (enclosed)

7   10.05am   REPORT FROM THE PRINCIPAL AND UPDATE ON HE SECTOR/UNIVERSITY DEVELOPMENTS   (enclosed)

10:25   *Coffee*

8   10.45am   FINANCE AND PLANNING

8.1   Student Intake, Student Population and Budgetary Impact 2022/23 (Strictly Confidential)   (enclosed)

ANNUAL REPORT/ACCOUNTS and ASSOCIATED REPORTS

8.2   Finance Report: 2022/23 – Position and Projection (Strictly Confidential): For Decision   (enclosed)
8.3   Going Concern Report (Strictly Confidential)   (enclosed)
8.4   Financing Report for Year End 31 July 2022 (Strictly Confidential) (enclosed)
8.5   Annual Report and Accounts for Year End 31 July 2022: For Decision
(enclosed)
8.6   External Auditor's Report & Representation Letter (Strictly Confidential)
(enclosed)
8.7   Audit and Risk Committee Report to Court and Annual Report (Strictly Confidential): For Decision   (enclosed)
8.8   Internal Auditor's Annual Report (Strictly Confidential)   (enclosed)

9   12.00noon   RISK MANAGEMENT: RISK APPETITE: For Decision   (enclosed)

10   12:20pm   ANTI-RACISM STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION   (enclosed)

12:30pm to 1.15pm Lunch

11   1.15pm   PRESENTATION ON LEAGUE TABLES

12   1.35pm   GOVERNANCE & REGULATORY

      12.1 SFC Outcome Agreement: For Decision   (enclosed)
      12.2 Annual Statement on Research Governance: For Decision   (enclosed)
      12.3 Annual Health and Safety Report 2021-22   (enclosed)

13   2.00pm   REPORTS FROM THE SENATE AND FROM COURT SUB-COMMITTEES

      13.1 Senate: For Decision   (enclosed)

      Court Sub-Committee Reports

      13.2 Finance and Resourcing Committee Report: For Decision   (enclosed)
      13.3 Commercialisation Committee Report   (enclosed)
      13.4 Pensions Advisory Group   (enclosed)
      13.5 Governance and Nominations Committee Report: For Decision   (enclosed)

    2.30pm   Close of Business

14   FURTHER REPORTS FOR NOTE OR REFERENCE AVAILABLE IN RESOURCES AREA OF DECISION TIME

      14.1 Report from the Partnership, Negotiating & Consultative Committee

15   DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 1 March 2023 9am to 3pm

22 November 2022

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

REPORT FROM THE RECTOR

1.   PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

1.1   This paper provides Court with a report from the Rector.

2.   RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1   The paper is for **information** and no action is required.

3.   INTRODUCTION

As this is our last Court meeting for the year, I thought it would be helpful to provide members of Court with a report highlighting the focus of my activities as Rector since our last meeting at the beginning of October 2022.

3.1   Rector's Surgeries and Concerns Raised by Students:

3.1.1   Following on our last Court meeting on the 4th of October, I have held 5 further Rector's Surgeries during which I have been able to work along University and Students' Association colleagues to help resolve issues that students have raised with me.

3.1.2   The following are the types of issues that I have assisted with:

- Employability and work ready skills continue to be a constant worry amongst students. Staff at employability and career services have been working tirelessly to support students in this regard, and our Court member (Robert) has kindly volunteered to offer his expertise and I am sure our students would be delighted to learn more from Robert.
- Concerns raised by mature students (PGRs) around workload and lack of support around extracurricular activities or events. That our current offerings are highly weighted towards undergraduates.
- Concerns around lack of feedback and impact on learning, further assessments.
- Issues around cost of living and money worries.

3.1.3   Feedback from students:

Whilst most students attend my surgeries to raise concerns, it has been very refreshing to listen to a couple of students who only came to express their profound gratitude. The following comments from students brought a giant smile to face, I hope you feel same too:

"It's been great coming back to in-person learning, the staff have been remarkable"

"I know this is insignificant and maybe a waste of your time, but I just wanted to say I love studying at the University of Aberdeen. I find the staff very helpful"

"Knowing a black person is the Rector of the University of Aberdeen gave me hope. I came to this university to study, knowing a degree from this prestigious University will take me places and help me become a better version of myself"

3.2   Events/Engagements Within and Outside the University:

- I attended the PGR welcome reception where I was invited to say a few words to the PGRs. Following my address at the event I received the below comments:

"We met at the PGR welcome event yesterday, it was good meeting you in person. Your session was intriguing and inspiring, excellent, and heart-warming, everyone I heard giving feedback about the event referred to your session as an inspiring and unforgettable experience".

- I also attended the Business School Celebratory Event, following Guardian 2023 University/School rankings (Accounting and Finance 2nd; Business and Management 11th and Economics 16th in the UK). It was an honour to have been able to address the staff and students, and to thank Prof Haina Zhang and her team for their hard work. I also thanked our students for their efforts and presented awards certificates to best performing students.

- In addition to the above, I have also participated in committee meetings, attended the Business Committee Strategy Session as well as other significant events within the university including the Remembrance Service at the King's College Chapel.

- On the 16th of November, I will be speaking at The Times Higher Education Conference in London.

3.3 Raising the Profile of the Role of the University Rector

3.3.1 During my election campaign, 98% of students we had conversations with had no clue who a Rector was. In addition to the action points in my manifesto, I made it a point of duty to raise the profile of the role of Rector and the significant difference an effective and engaging Rector can make in the life of students/staff/overall University Community. It's now 11 months into my role, and that has changed remarkably; I am often stopped both on/off campus by students.

3.4 Winter Graduations

3.4.1 As our students prepare for their upcoming graduation ceremony, I would like to send my congratulations and to thank our staff immensely for their hard work.

3.5 University Family

3.5.1 I have received excellent support these past 11 months, through my regular meetings with the Principal, Professor George Boyne, Julie Ashworth, the Senior Governor and with Tracey Slaven, the Secretary and Chief Operating Officer; our Court colleague Nick Edwards in his role as Head of Student Support, other members of University Management, the Students' Association Sabbatical Officers and Chief Executive, and other members of the University family. All have been very helpful to me as I continue to discharge my duties and to building the relationships that are key to being effective in the role of Rector.

3.6 Looking Ahead

3.6.1 Having spent my first year laying solid foundations and building key relationships, over the next twelve months I will continue to support students, but I will be looking outward too to build external networks that are key in furthering our aims.

3.6.2 It has been an honour to serve as your Rector, and I am looking forward to doing much more in 2023.

3.6.3 As this is the last Court meeting for the year, I would like to send you all my very best Christmas wishes in advance.

4. FURTHER INFORMATION

4.1 Further information is available from the Rector, rector@abdn.ac.uk

Confidentiality Status: Open

UNIVERSITY COURT

22 November 2022

**DECLARATION OF INTEREST, BUSINESS FOR DISCUSSION
AND REMINDER OF COURT AND MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES**

DECLARATION OF INTEREST:

Any member or individual in attendance (including officers) who has a clear interest in a matter on the agenda must declare that interest at the meeting.

BUSINESS FOR DISCUSSION:

All items of business are for discussion, providing information or context relevant for current or future decisions.   Those items that require a decision today are annotated accordingly.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF COURT AND COURT MEMBERS

Enclosed is a reminder for Court, for information, of:

(a) its remit and primary responsibilities and the schedule of decisions reserved to it;
(b) the role and duties of members, in particular, as trustees in charity law;

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information is available from Bruce Purdon, Clerk to the Court, email b.purdon@abdn.ac.uk.

Confidentiality Status: Open

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

RESPONSIBILITIES OF COURT AND DUTIES OF MEMBERS AS CHARITY TRUSTEES

1.   REMIT AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1.1   The constitutional basis, authority and responsibilities of the University Court are derived largely from the statutes contained in the Universities (Scotland) Acts from 1858 to 1966 and in the Ordinances and Resolutions made thereunder. Latterly this has been supplemented by the requirements of the Higher Education Governance Scotland (Act). The University is also a registered Scottish Charity and as such the Court as the governing body is the board of trustees, its members are charity trustees and subject to Scottish charities law, with accountability to the Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator (OSCR). The powers and functions of the Court are drawn from these requirements of statute and are set out in its Statement of Primary Responsibilities https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/court-information.php#panel2452

1.2   The Court has delegated many of its functions to its sub-committees: Audit and Risk, Commercialisation, Finance and Resourcing, Governance and Nominations, and Remuneration. These are set out in the respective remits of each Committee – and going forward brought together under a Schedule of Delegations expected to be considered by Court in November 2022. It should be noted, however, that Court as the governing body remains ultimately responsible for any decisions made by sub-committees on its behalf.

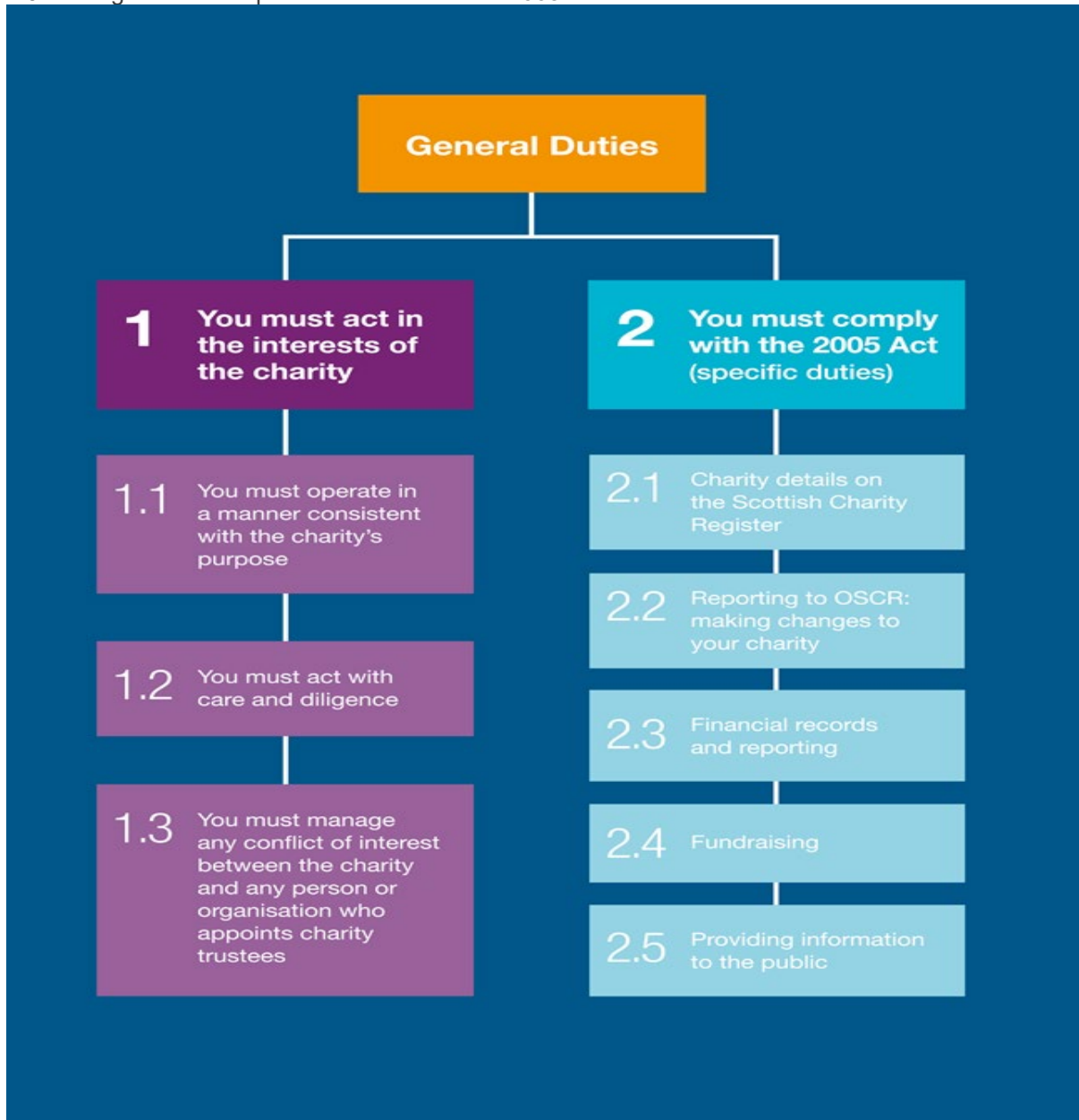**2.   ROLE OF MEMBERS, CODE OF CONDUCT AND DUTIES OF CHARITY TRUSTEES**

2.1   Members are reminded of their role as a governor (detailed below), the Court's Code of Conduct for Members (provided in your letter of appointment a condition of appointment) and, in particular, your duties as charity trustees under the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005. You should also be aware of the requirements of the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance http://www.scottishuniversitygovernance.ac.uk/2017-code/ and the Financial Memorandum with the Scottish Funding Council:
http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Guidance_Governance/Financial_Memorandum_with_higher_education_institutions_-_1_December_2014.pdf

Duties in Charities Law

2.2   These are summarised below, but more detailed guidance on the duties of charity trustees OSCR were provided in papers for the September 2020 meeting or available here https://www.oscr.org.uk/guidance-and-forms/guidance-and-good-practice-for-charity-trustees/ All members are asked to regularly review their responsibilities as individual charity trustees in law.

2.3   All charity trustees have legal duties and responsibilities under the **2005 Act**. A duty is something that you must do, and all the duties must be met. These duties are separated out into **general duties**, that set out a broad framework that all charity trustees must work within, and **specific duties** detailed in the 2005 Act – OSCR note that you might delegate the practical details of the specific duties to your charity's staff, volunteers or professional advisers, but that the charity trustees are ultimately responsible for making sure the specific duties are met. The general and specific duties apply equally to **all** charity trustees and to **all** charities. All of the charity's trustees should work together to make sure that these duties are met. If you fail to comply with these duties then this is **misconduct** and OSCR have powers to take action against charity trustees, where appropriate. OSCR state that their response will be proportionate depending on the situation. Where a charity trustee has acted reasonably and honestly it is unlikely to be treated as misconduct.

2.4   As a charity trustee, the key duty is to look after the charity's **assets** and for making sure that the charity fulfils its **charitable purpose(s) – the University's purposes based on OSCR**

registration categorisations are: the advancement of higher education, of health, of citizenship or community development, and the advancement of the arts, heritage, culture or science.

2.5   The general and specific duties under the 2005 Act are:

General Duties

1 You must act in the interests of the charity

1.1 You must operate in a manner consistent with the charity's purpose

1.2 You must act with care and diligence

1.3 You must manage any conflict of interest between the charity and any person or organisation who appoints charity trustees

2 You must comply with the 2005 Act (specific duties)

2.1 Charity details on the Scottish Charity Register

2.2 Reporting to OSCR: making changes to your charity

2.3 Financial records and reporting

2.4 Fundraising

2.5 Providing information to the public

3.   COURT'S AGREED ROLE DESCRIPTION FOR COURT MEMBERS

3.1   In addition to the duties under law, the Court's agreed role description for governors, taking into account the requirements of the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance is:

Each governor is responsible, collectively with fellow governors, for the effective leadership of the University in all its aspects. That translates into more specific responsibilities of which the following are key:

- To play an appropriate part in furthering the values of higher education and the mission of the University of Aberdeen in particular;

- To ensure that the Court exercises efficient and effective use of the resources of the University, maintains its long-term financial viability, and safeguards its assets, and that proper mechanisms exist to ensure financial control and for the prevention of fraud;

- To exercise oversight in respect of the academic, corporate, financial, estate and human resource functions delegated to the authority of the Principal as chief executive;

- To ensure that Court conducts itself in accordance with accepted standards of behaviour in public life, embracing duty, selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability and stewardship, openness, honesty, leadership and respect. Members must at all times regulate their personal conduct as members of the Court in accordance with these standards;

- To establish constructive and supportive but challenging working relationships with the University employees with whom they come into contact, whilst recognising the proper separation between governance and executive management;

- To act fairly and impartially in the interests of the University as a whole using independent judgement and maintaining confidentiality as appropriate;

Ends

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 4 OCTOBER 2022
(in the Sir Duncan Rice Library and via Teams)

Present: Julie Ashworth (in the Chair for items from minutes 3 onward except for minutes 37)
Colette Backwell
Camilo Torres Barragán
Eleanor Bentley
George Boyne (except for minutes 36)
Martina Chukwuma-Ezike (in the Chair for minutes 1-2)
Owen Cox
Nick Edwards
Iain Mackay
Gary McRae
Helen Martin
Lyndsay Menzies
Caryn Miller
Martin Mills
Anne Minto
Vanessa Mabonso Nzola
Iain Percival
Charlotte Pope-Williams
Diane Skåtun
Otto Thoresen
Joachim Schaper (via Teams)
Robert Traynham
Neil Vargesson
Ilia Xypolia.

In attendance: Debbie Dyker
Pete Edwards
David Evans
Jenny Fernandes
Karl Leydecker
Tracey Slaven
Alan Speight
Ruth Taylor
Louise Thomson
Mark White
Bruce Purdon (Clerk).

Apologies: Keith Anderson
Iain Torrance KCVO.

WELCOME AND RECTOR'S REPORT

1   The Rector welcomed Vanessa Mabonso Nzola and Ilia Xypolia to their first meeting as Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) nominated member and Senate Assessor member respectively. The Rector also welcomed David Evans to his first meeting as a Governor Apprentice member and Louise Thomson as Head of Governance and Executive Support (in attendance).

2   The Rector provided an oral and written report *(copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes)* which highlighted some of the different types of issues that had been raised by students at her surgeries. These included support for employability, course assessment issues and impact of absence due to ill-health, visa-renewal issues, and the cost of living and financial hardship

concerns. The Rector also reported on the meetings and events that she had participated in across the University community since the last meeting of Court.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REMINDER OF
COURT AND MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

3   The Court noted the standing reminder of the responsibilities of Court and members as charity trustees *(copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes).* A declaration of interest in the agenda was noted from Owen Cox as a Trustee of the University of Aberdeen Superannuation and Life Assurance Scheme (UASLAS).

MINUTES

4   The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2022 were approved *(copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes)*.

ACTION LOG, MATTERS ARISING AND DECISIONS BY CIRCULATION

5   The Court noted the updated Action Log *(copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes)* and a report on matters that had been agreed by circulation, these being:

- Approval of the membership of Court Committees and the Pension Advisory Group, and of the proposed composition and membership of the Investment Committee while noting that this would require further approval by the Development Trust Board.
- On the recommendation of the Senate, approval of draft resolutions regarding changes to Degree Resolutions, changes to the Policy on Fitness to Practise, changes to the Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic) and to the Policy for Dealing with Allegations of Academic Misconduct Against Graduates of the University.

6   In discussion, it was noted that there had been further developments with regard to the SFC Pathfinder initiative and agreed that this action could be considered complete. The Senior Governor provided updates regarding progress against some further matters noted in the action log which remained pending.

REPORT FROM THE SENIOR GOVERNOR

7   The Court received and noted a report from the Senior Governor on the meetings and activities she had undertaken since the previous meeting *(copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes).* In discussion, it was suggested it would be helpful to receive more information on the main issues discussed by the Senior Governor in meetings with wider sector stakeholders.

REPORT FROM THE PRINCIPAL AND UPDATE ON
HE SECTOR/UNIVERSITY DEVELOPMENTS

8   The Court received a report on policy developments relating to higher education and the recent achievements of staff and students at Aberdeen *(copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes),* supplemented by an oral report from the Principal.

9   The Principal discussed with Court the implications of the cost of living crisis for staff and students and the steps the University was taking, in partnership with the Students' Association, to provide support for those most in need including with regard to PhD stipend increases, international students and the provision of designated warm spaces across the campus. The Principal also noted the University's recent performance in league table rankings and congratulated staff and students for the University moving from 20th to 13th in The Guardian University Guide – Aberdeen's highest ever ranking – and in consolidating its Top 20 position in the Times/Sunday Times Rankings in which it had moved up one place to 19th. The achievement of staff and students in Aberdeen moving from 5th to 4th in the UK in the National Student Survey was also noted and the Court recorded its appreciation of the contribution of all staff and students to this and the Vice-Principal for Education.

10   In further discussion, the Principal anticipated some of the key issues that the Court would have the opportunity to engage with at its strategy day. The importance of the University building on its recent success and maintaining momentum by focusing on new opportunities and creating the

headroom for further investment was noted. As part of this and the later discussion of the Operational Plan for the year ahead, the Court also noted that the current significant fiscal crisis in the UK economy and wider external economic pressures could present challenges for the University and that it would need to be able to respond to these. The Principal assured the Court, that while recognising that risk, the University should take confidence from its recent achievements but that it had the ability to manage those challenges by pausing or stopping aspects of the delivery of Aberdeen 2040 if necessary.

11   It was noted that members would welcome:

- an infographic or short briefing on the sector funding position that could assist them in their advocacy role;
- a discussion at a future meeting of the longer term plan for the physical and digital estate;
- further updates on the work being undertaken to support students that had been noted above.

ABERDEEN 2040 STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN TO 2025

SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE 2021/22

12   The Court received a report on the University's progress over 2021/22 against the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in place to track delivery of Aberdeen 2040 *(copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes).* These covered Education, Research, Regional Engagement, Inclusive, Interdisciplinary, International, Sustainable, Financial Sustainability, and League Table Performance. The Court noted that in overall terms good progress had been made against the majority of KPIs and the report outlined the further work being undertaken to address areas where performance was behind the relevant KPI.

13   The connection between teaching and research and challenges of workload for staff in delivering both to a high-standard, in particular in terms of research excellence, were discussed. It was acknowledged that while new investment in staff had meant student:staff ratios were improving, the aspiration was to go further but that was dependent on achieving the growth in income to sustain further investment.

14   The Court approved the report.

PROPOSED OPERATIONAL PLAN FOR 2022/23

15   The Court received the Aberdeen 2040 Operational Plan for 2022/23 *(copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes)*. The plan proposed in particular that, as was also consistent with the Principal's objectives for the year, the University would give enhanced focus to the following six key areas of strategic importance over 2022/23:

1. Delivering the Court-approved budget, including a targeted £20million increase in tuition fee income.
2. Rebuilding research capacity and research quality.
3. Supporting student employability, with a primary focus on work experience opportunities for students.
4. Strengthening connections with industry by increasing collaborative activities and economic impact.
5. Developing a plan for institutional growth and investment to 2030.
6. Supporting the wellbeing, health and safety of staff and students, and enabling people to achieve their full potential.

16   In discussion, the Court considered the challenges to student recruitment in the widening access context, particularly given the cost of living crisis and that further deliberation would be given to what further support the University could offer in that context to mitigate that. The Court noted the significant risks that the external environment could pose to the delivery of the priorities and that the challenge would be to be able to quickly adjust and revisit priorities in the wider plan beyond those key areas if those risks were realised.

17	The Court approved the Operational Plan for 2022/23, noting the potential challenges to delivery from the external environment.

AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT

STRATEGIC RISK MANAGEMENT – BIANNUAL REPORT

18	The Court received the bi-annual report on risk management at institutional level *(copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes)*, the timing of which had been brought forward from November, to ensure the most recent version of the Strategic Risk Register (SRR) informed the University's Annual Report. This would be a permanent re-alignment of the reporting cycle with reports submitted to Court in September and March/April each year, dependent on meeting dates.

19	The Court noted that the report included six areas of risk that were rated as critical, in particular the volatility of the external environment which had increased further since the point the report had been written. The assessment of staffing risks was discussed and the basis for the assessment as being significant rather than critical was noted. A number of members noted their concern regarding workload and staffing levels and it was acknowledged that while investment had been made and more planned to address this, more was required. It was suggested the University should, as part of its staffing planning, consider the continuing need for staff with the skills, experience and training to meet the needs of a student community that was growing in size and diversity.

20	The Court noted the report on strategic risks and the measures that were in place or planned to mitigate against these.

AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE REPORT

21	The Court received a report of the business considered by the Audit and Risk Committee at its meeting of 5 September 2022 *(copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes).*

22	The Court ratified the Committee's terms of reference for 2022-23. The Court also noted the following business that had been considered by the Committee:

- the Committee's input and comments on the draft Risk Appetite Statement.

- the following items that had been approved by the Committee via its delegated authority:
  o	the Schedule of Business for the Committee for 2022-23.
  o	the process and timeline for the tender process to appoint new internal and external auditors during 2022-23.
  o	the draft Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion for 2021-22 from the internal auditor, for inclusion with the Annual Report and Accounts.
  o	the final Internal Audit Plan 2022-23 and the Committee's oversight of progress in respect of associated internal audit fieldwork.

- the Committee's consideration and discussion of the following matters:
  o	the progress of recruitment of two new External Members to the Committee to commence office from 1 November 2022.
  o	current developments within the University's external and operating environments from a risk management perspective and the bi-annual risk management update (see minute 18 above), and the Committee's requests for the addition of emerging risks relating to energy and people issues, and a review of individual risk ratings in the context of their overall importance to the University's operation.
  o	the findings and recommendations of the *Supplier Continuity and Resilience (IT Infrastructure)* and *Payroll* internal audit reports).
  o	progress against outstanding internal audit actions.
  o	the ongoing work of the external auditor to finalise and report on the 2021-22 audit by the deadline for inclusion within the Annual Report and.
  o	the further requirement for the University to submit USGAAP accounts for 2021-22 to the US Treasury Department.

GOVERNANCE AND REGULATORY

ANNUAL REPORT TO SFC ON INSTITUTIONAL-LED REVIEW OF TEACHING QUALITY

23   The Court received and approved the Annual Report to the Scottish Funding Council on Institution-Led Review of Quality 2020/21 (*copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes*).

USE OF UNIVERSITY SEAL

24   The Court received a paper which set out proposed guidance on the use of the University Common Seal *(copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes)*. This had been developed in response to recommendations in the Governance Review Action Plan. The Court approved the guidance document for further implementation.

SCHEDULE OF COURT BUSINESS FOR 2022/23

25   The Court received a proposed schedule of business for the year ahead for further input and development *(copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes)*. The Court noted that it might revise the schedule should members identify further priorities for discussion arising from the Strategy Meeting.

REPORTS FROM THE SENATE AND COURT SUB-COMMITTEES

SENATE

26   The Court received a report on the key items of business considered by the Senate at its meeting of 21 September 2022 *(copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes)*. The report detailed the Senate's consideration of:

- Reports from the Education Committee and Research Policy Committee;
- Reports from the Academic Promotion Review Working Group;
- Revisions to Honorary Degree Procedures;
- Nominations to the Dick Bequest Trust where it was noted that the Senate had agreed that it would no longer elect individuals to the Trust.

COURT-SUB COMMITTEE REPORTS

Finance and Resourcing Committee Report and Financial Year-End Position

27   The Court received a report of the key items of business from the Finance and Resourcing Committee of 15 September 2022 (*copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes*). The Court:

- approved the Committee's terms of reference for 2022-23.

- noted that the Committee had approved the following under its delegated authority from Court:
  - o a revised Schedule of Business for the Committee for 2022-23.
  - o tuition fees for 2023-24.
  - o a draft institutional Insurance Strategy.
  - o a summary of debt write-off for 2021-22, totalling £338k.
  - o a revised Treasury Management Policy, amended to take into account all recommendations made by the University's internal auditors as part of the Financial Forecasting internal audit.

- noted the Committee's consideration and discussion of the following matters:
  - o current developments within the University's external and operating environments.
  - o the repayment of outstanding tuition fee debt.

- o a deep-dive presentation on the Financial Sustainability elements of the institutional Risk Register.
- o the transfer of relevant outstanding actions and matters arising from the dissolved Policy & Resources Committee to the Finance & Resourcing Committee, including an update on progress with regard to the University's Field Cycling Imaging (FCI) Scanner project.
- o the draft outturn 2021-22, on which a further oral update would be presented to Court (see Minute 30).
- o the renewal of all University insurance cover for 2022-23.
- o updates on the current status of the annual valuations of the University of Aberdeen Superannuation and Life Assurance Scheme (UASLAS) and the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS).
- o a summary of the anticipated financial implications across the key focus areas of Aberdeen 2040 for 2022-23.
- o an update from the Investment Committee in relation to the University's endowment, Development Trust and Northern College portfolios and progress against the revised Investment Strategy and commitment to fossil fuel divestment.

28   In discussion of the Committee's consideration of insurance matters, it was noted that the Business Committee of the General Council had expressed an interest in the condition of the University retained areas of Marischal, in particular with regard to fire safety. It was confirmed that the University had undertaken a fire safety assessment of the building and that work was ongoing to develop an appropriate response to its findings.

29   The Court also received a verbal report from the Chief Financial Officer on the University's unaudited financial year end position for 2021/22, noting that this had resulted in a £6.9M surplus against a budget target of a £3M deficit. While this was welcome, it was noted that the surplus had in large part been due to underspends that would impact the current financial year.

Governance and Nominations Committee

30   The Court received a report from the meeting of the Governance and Nominations Committee held on 13 September 2022 *(copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes)*.

31   The Court, on the recommendation of the Committee, agreed to delegate authority to the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee to approve the appointment of two external members of that committee.

32   The Court approved recommended amendments to the Governance and Nomination Committee's terms of reference and composition.

33   The Court approved minor amendments to the wording of the Court Members' Code of Conduct.

34   The Court was advised of the opportunity to express an interest in undertaking the role of Court Race Champion and received details of the role description. The Court noted the commitment required of the role and whether it was reasonable to expect to be fulfilled on a voluntary basis but agreed to await the outcome of the expressions of interest process.

REPORT FROM THE PARTNERSHIP, NEGOTIATING AND CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

35   The Court received for information and reference the report from the meeting of 25 August 2022 of the Partnership, Negotiating and Consultative Committee *(copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes)*. A member expressed concern regarding delays in the progressing of grievances and complaints. It was agreed that the points raised would be reported to the Committee as the appropriate forum for their consideration, while noting that Committee could escalate any matter to the Court should it agree to do so.

CLOSED BUSINESS: REMUNERATION COMMITTEE

36   The Court in closed session (for which the Principal and officers in attendance bar the Secretary withdrew) received and noted report from the Remuneration Committee meeting of 28 June 2022

(copy filed with the principal copy of the Minutes). The minute of that discussion is restricted to members of Court and held separately.

CLOSED BUSINESS: SENIOR GOVERNOR PERFORMANCE REVIEW

37   The Court in closed session (for which the Senior Governor and officers in attendance bar the Secretary withdrew) considered the Senior Governor's Annual Performance Review. The minute of that discussion is restricted to members of Court and held separately.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

38   Tuesday, 22 November 2022 9am to 3pm.

22 November 2022

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

ACTION LOG, MATTERS ARISING AND DECISIONS BY CIRCULATION

1.   PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

1.1   This paper provides Court with a copy for information of the current Court Action Log (**Appendix 1**).

1.2   It also formally notes for the record that since the last meeting in October 2022, the Court approved by circulation the appointment of Colette Backwell as Senior Independent Member with effect from 2 November 2022.

2.   PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	**Date**
Previously considered or approved by	n/a	
Further consideration/approval required by	n/a	n/a

3.   RECOMMENDED ACTION

3.1   The Court is invited to:

   (i)   Note the action log (Appendix 1) and decisions agreed by circulation noted above.

4.   FURTHER INFORMATION

4.1   Further information is available from Bruce Purdon, Clerk to the Court, email b.purdon@abdn.ac.uk.

22 November 2022 **Confidentiality Status:** Open

UNIVERSITY COURT: LOG OF FOLLOW UP ACTIONS FROM COURT MEETINGS

Court Date	Minute Ref	Action Arising	Action By:-	Status
June 2021	536	**RESEARCH FORWARD LOOK** The Court also discussed the impact and commercialisation of the University's existing excellence in research and noted the initiatives that were being taken to foster links with industry and commercial application of research. It was agreed that it would be helpful to receive more information on this, in particular with regard to the work of the Rowett Institute, as part of one the pre-Court presentation evenings.	Clerk	**Pending:** ~~Noted for Future pre Court Presentations~~ **Complete:** Proposed to be remitted to Commercialisation Committee
Mar 2022	124	**ACTION LOG, MATTERS ARISING AND DECISIONS BY CIRCULATION** The Court had also been notified by circulation that on the recommendation of the University Start Up and Spin-Out Group the Principal had, under powers delegated to him by Court, agreed that the University as a share-holder in [redacted], give consent to the Director's application to wind-up the company, it having been declared insolvent. It was agreed that it would be helpful for the Court to receive a presentation or briefing on the risks and opportunities of spin-out work at a future meeting.	Vice-Principal for Research/University Secretary	**Pending:** ~~To be Scheduled for a Future Meeting~~ **Complete:** Proposed to be remitted to Commercialisation Committee
Mar 2022	135	**ANTI-RACISM STRATEGY** [Court noted] the need to ensure staff at all levels were trained in how to respond to issues of racism The Court (ii) Asked to receive an implementation timeline, to include the provision of staff training, at a future meeting.	Vice-Principal for Education	**Pending:** Deferred to November Court to minimise routine Court meeting business. **Included on November Court Agenda**

Mar 2022	169	**ACTIONS IN RELATION TO UKRAINE** The Court noted the importance of taking a consistent approach to support for the victims of all conflicts. It was agreed that it would be helpful for the Court to have a further discussion around a set of principles to guide future responses by the University to similar issues in other parts of the world.	University Secretary	**Pending:** Included in schedule of business for 2022/23 – March 203 Meeting
Mar 2022	170	**FUTURE BUSINESS** It was agreed the Court should receive at a future meeting a paper on the strategy for developing courses and the infrastructure required to deliver these.	VP Education/VP Global Student Recruitment	**Pending**: To be scheduled for 2022/23 as part of April Deep Dive with an overview of the process by which programmes are approved.
June 2022	200	**GOVERNANCE REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION** *Committee Structure* The Court approved Option B as the proposed structure of Court Committees for 2022/23 and noted that the operation of the structure would be reviewed after one year. *Schedule of Delegation* The Court noted an outline draft and proposed approach to the development Schedule of Delegation and Approval Authorities between Court, its sub-committees, SMT and Senior Officers. Subject to approval of the proposed Court Committee Structure, this would be developed further and brought back to Court for approval for implementation in in autumn 2022.	University Secretary University Secretary	**Pending:** Scheduled for Autumn 2023 **Pending:** ~~Scheduling for Nov 2022~~ Deferred to March 2023.

Oct 2022	11	**REPORT FROM THE PRINCIPAL & HE SECTOR/UNIVERSITY DEVELOPMENTS** It was noted that members would welcome:		
		• an infographic or short briefing on the sector funding position that could assist them in their advocacy role;	Chief Financial Officer	**Pending: January 2023**
		• a discussion at a future meeting of the longer term plan for the physical and digital estate;	Senior Vice-Principal and Vice-Principal Regional Engagement	**June 2023 Meeting**
		• further updates on the work being undertaken to support students that had been noted above [in context of cost of living/energy crisis].	University Secretary & Chief Operating Officer	**Pending:** March 2023 Meeting

List of completed items available on Court Intranet or on request from the Clerk.

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

POST-REF ACTION PLAN

1.   PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

1.1   This paper presents a finalised REF action plan for information and discussion. Draft plans were previously shared with Court at their June and October meetings. The updated plan incorporates further feedback received from Senate, from REF panellists and from School visits.

2.   PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	URC Senate discussion SMT	28 September 2022 21 September 2022 29 September 2022 & 3 October 2022
Further consideration/ approval required by	n/a	

3.   RECOMMENDED ACTION

3.1   Members of the Court are invited to **note and discuss the information provided in the finalised REF plan**.

4.   DISCUSSION

4.1   The REF (Research Excellence Framework) exercise is a UK wide assessment of the quality of research undertaken at UK Universities. A REF exercise is undertaken every 5-7 years. The latest REF was undertaken in 2021 with results published in May 2022.

4.2   The REF is a process of expert review, carried out by expert panels for each of the subject-based units of assessment (UoAs). Expert panels are made up of senior academics, international members, and research users. For each submission, three distinct elements are assessed: the quality of outputs (we submit a sample of our publications and other outputs) forms 60% of the assessment score, impact of the research (beyond academia, assessed through impact case studies) forms 25% of the assessment score, and the environment that supports research (assessed through a narrative that describes our environment) forms the final 15% of the score.

4.3   Research is assessed and categorised into 4* (world-leading), 3* (internationally excellent), 2* (internationally recognised), 1* (nationally recognised) or unclassified (not nationally recognised or not within the REF definition of research). The percentages of 4* and 3* research for each unit of assessment are then factored into the formula the funding councils use to determine our recurrent research grant – 4*:3* research is funded in a ratio of 4:1

4.4   It is important to note that REF2021 assessed the historical research performance over a period of 7 years, from 2014 to 2020 (census date for REF2021 was 31 July 2020). The REF2021 assessment period from 2014 to 2020 was particularly challenging for the University of Aberdeen – it was subject to significant funding cuts, organisational restructuring, with significant loss of staff and periods of recruitment stops which impacted adversely on our research capacity and our ability to invest in the research environment (we lost 25% of research capacity, from an FTE of 797 staff to a low of 599 – this had recovered in part by the census date to 697). Given these

challenges we had, as previously reported to Court, anticipated a reduction in performance compared to REF 2014.

4.5 Overall, the results for REF2021 were disappointing and, as anticipated, indicated a significant reduction in performance. In terms of quality, only two units of assessment (Theology and Religious Studies – which was ranked 1st in the UK; and Public Health, Health Services and Primary Care, which was ranked 8th in the UK and 1st in Scotland) achieved top quartile rankings, and a further three achieved second quartile ranking (Psychology, Computing Science and Law). Our overall ranking within the UK fell from 46th in REF2014 for quality to 61st.

4.6 The financial implications of the REF2021 results for the University are substantial. We will experience a reduction of Research Excellence Grant (REG) of 23.6% going forward. This equates to a reduction of £4.7m annually for the duration of the next assessment period (likely until 2028). For this financial year (22/23) the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) committed to reduce REG by no more than 10%, thus the reduction in this financial year is £1.9m. The full reduction will apply from 2023/24 onwards.

4.7 It is important to note, however, that the investments authorised by Court late in the REF assessment period impacted positively on the funding outcome. Had we submitted in March 2019 when our staff numbers were at their lowest, and achieved a similar quality outcome, our REG would have been reduced by a further £1.3m a year.

4.8 Achieving a larger proportion of 4* research in the next REF exercise will be crucial to increasing our REG income and therefore our ability to invest in, and support, research at the University of Aberdeen. Within the 2022/23 REG allocations, a single 4* output had an associated monetary value of £10k, compared to £2.5k for a 3* output, and no funding at all for 2* or 1* outputs. A 4* impact case study was worth £99,1k, and a 3* case study £24.7k. Environment support for a researcher in a 4* research environment is around £5k, while support within a 3* research environment is £1.2k a year. If funding for REG remains at 2022/23 levels throughout the assessment period, then a 4* case study will 'earn' around £694k over the current assessment period, and a 4* output £70k. The measures set out below will increase research quality and the percentage of 4* research we will be able to submit to the next REF.

5. POST-REF REVIEW

5.1 Following the publication of the REF results, a deep dive of all available REF data was undertaken including assessment of panel reports, feedback on unit of assessments received, discussions with panel members and interrogation of nationally available REF data which later became publicly available. Meetings were also held with each School, led by the Principal, Senior Vice Principal and the Vice Principal Research, to discuss the REF2021 results. Discussions focused on learning from the current REF results and on measures that would enable Schools to achieve top quartile outcomes in the next research assessment exercise, expected to take place in 2028.

5.2 The meetings were attended by Heads of School and School Directors of Research, and in some cases, previous School Directors of Research or colleagues who were tasked with leading submissions to REF2021. Colleagues from Research and Innovation also attended. The discussions were informed by data packs for each unit of assessment to which the Schools submitted.

5.3 Discussions focused on the core elements required for the delivery of high-quality research - a relentless focus on quality; time to undertake quality research; adequate resources and a supportive research culture.

5.4 While suggestions differed according to disciplinary requirements and culture, a number of common themes and proposals emerged from the discussions:

- Ongoing workload issues
- Issues with wide-spread lack of awareness of REF requirements around quality and star level descriptors

- Perceived ongoing issues with incentivisation and reward for impact
- The need for continuous review and peer support for research and impact
- Resources and processes to support high quality research and impact
- Research culture

5.5 Discussions suggested that, to ensure an environment conducive to the delivery of world class research is in place, actions need to be taken at each level of the organisation: at **institutional, School/unit of assessment** and **individual level**.

6. POST REF2021 ACTION PLAN

6.1 Building on these findings, we have been working on a post-REF action plan to ensure timely preparations for an improved outcome in the next assessment exercise. Initial drafts of the plan were discussed by SMT in June 2022 (and again in September and November 2022), and by RPC (June 2022), Court (June 2022 and October 2022) and Senate (September 2022).

Work already in progress

6.2 Immediately following the REF submission, work started to position us for better performance in the next REF. We are nearing the completion of major work reviewing the workload model for staff to ensure that appropriate time is allocated to allow quality research to be undertaken. We have also undertaken a major institutional review of the promotion processes to ensure that quality research and impact is appropriately incentivised and rewarded. The new processes will be rolled out later in 2022.

6.3 We also put in place a number of measures to improve research culture and environment. A Task and Finish Group on Research Culture was commissioned and has now reported to the University Research Committee and Senate. It made a number of recommendations around career development; improving the experience of working in research; an inclusive and respectful environment; and changing the way in which research is undertaken.

6.4 A deep-dive on research income has also reported and benchmarked targets included in schools annual planning going forward. Further Task and Finish Groups on Postgraduate Research Students and on Research Centres were also commissioned and recommendations made. The recommendations from all groups will be taken forward alongside our implementation of our commitments under the Concordat for Researcher Development.

6.5 We have also ensured continued access to pump-prime funds for research support, for impact acceleration and for matched funding of large bids.

6.6 Additionally we are continuing to grow research capacity eg we are currently recruiting 20 interdisciplinary fellows (funded by the University's Development Trust).

Additional measures proposed

6.7 The introduction of a number of additional measures are now proposed to augment the work currently in progress. These are specifically targeted at the barriers identified by the REF analysis. There are actions proposed at institution, school, and individual level.

6.8 The following additional actions at **institutional level** are proposed:

- **Institutional Research Leave Scheme:** a competitive institutional scheme that provides funded research leave for researchers whose outputs and impacts are likely to achieve 4* ratings. This scheme would complement any scheme that is currently in place within Schools and would support both research and impact activities. There will be requirements for clear deliverables and monitoring of outcomes. The major cost will be to provide teaching backfill for the period of research leave, together with some travel and accommodation costs.

- **Visiting Scholar Scheme**: a competitive institutional scheme that provides funds for visiting scholars to support collaborative research and to provide an external view on the quality of our research quality and research environment
- **Conference attendance fund:** an enhanced funded scheme to provide resource for conference attendance in addition to schemes already in place within Schools, attendance/engagement with stakeholders or other activities to enable the generation/dissemination of 4* outputs and impacts
- **Strengthening impact support infrastructure:** additional resource for impact training and support to augment School and central structures
- **Calibration and assessment training**; a common institutional research assessment framework: training and awareness raising on REF panel expectations of 4* research and impact, discipline specific and where possible informed by insights from former REF panel members
- **New REF Steering Group** to advise on REF strategy and monitor research performance throughout the current assessment period

6.9   Additionally at **School level**, it is proposed to have a more systematised approach to ensure that academics are enabled to conduct and deliver world class research and impact including workload allocation, support for peer review and constructive improvement of outputs *before* submission for publication, and an early formulation of research strategy for each unit of assessment. A blueprint for this revised process was shared with the Heads of Schools Away Day on 23rd September, led by Professor Tom Greggs, who led the turnaround of the divinity submission to 1st in the UK in 2021. This will be followed up with Heads of Schools through the routine processes. A number of Schools have already set up REF Steering Groups to oversee early REF activities.

6.10   At the **individual level**, there is a need for training in what makes an output 3*/4* and a greater understanding of the importance of exercises such as REF, and engagement with them. This will be led by each unit of assessment with training from experts in the field including previous REF panellists. This will enable each academic own their personal contribution to REF and their contribution to an open, improvement-focused, collegiate research environment.

6.11   These additional actions represent a significant investment in our current staff to ensure that the research environment is conducive to the production of world-leading research. At a wider level, it will also make our research environment more attractive for the recruitment of new staff and the retention of current staff. Our current research capacity, measured by the number (FTE) of staff eligible for REG funding remains almost 9% below that of our eligible researcher population on REF2014 census date. It will also provide a useful safeguard should a restriction on portability of outputs be introduced in the next REF (ie new hires will not be able to take their outputs with them).

7.   **RESOURCES REQUIRED FOR POST-REF ACTION PLAN**
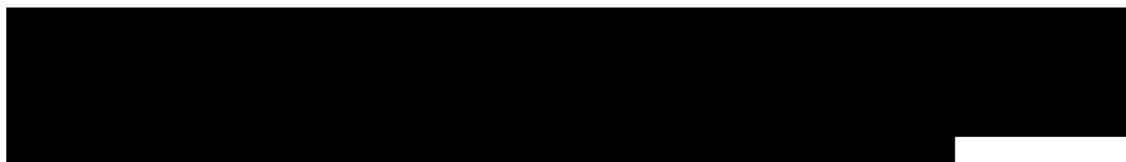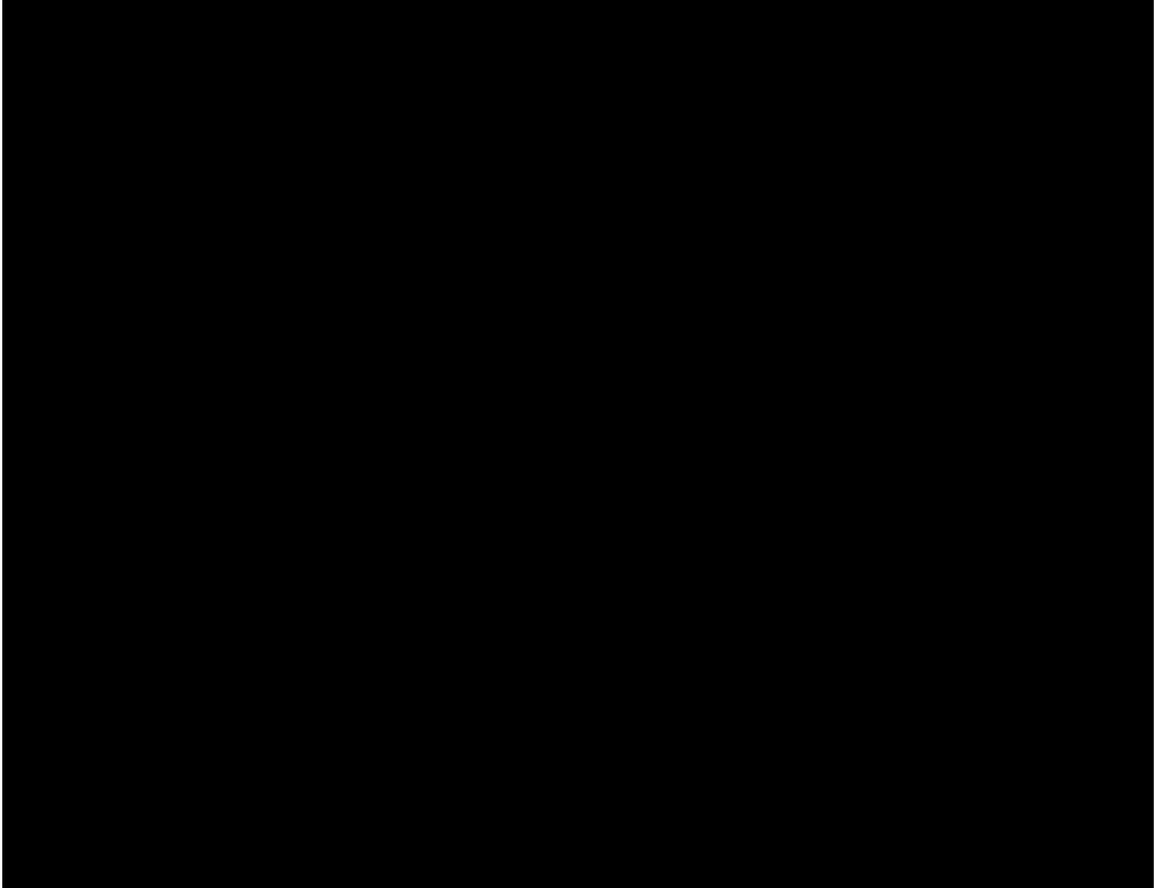
8.   MONITORING OF PROGRESS

8.1   It is important that there is a clear plan for the monitoring of progress.

8.2   There will be an assessment of REF preparedness (initial stock taking exercise) undertaken early in 2023, looking at 1 output for each REF eligible academic (best 3*/ideally 4* since January 2021/forward plans for excellent outputs) and identifying developing impact case studies so that support plans for each promising case study can be put in place.

8.3   This will be followed by an annual check on progress with a full mock-REF being undertaken every two years until the next REF exercise (currently estimated in 2028).

9.   SUMMARY AND ACTION REQUIRED BY COURT

9.1   Court is invited to **note and discuss the information provided in the finalised REF plan**.

10.   FURTHER INFORMATION

10.1   Further information is available from Marion Campbell, Vice Principal Research (e-mail: m.k.campbell@abdn.ac.uk); Liz Rattray, Director Research & Innovation (e-mail: e.rattray@abdn.ac.uk) or Marlis Barraclough (e-mail: m.barraclough@abdn.ac.uk), Research Policy and REF Manager

22 November 2022

Confidentiality Status: Partially Closed: paragraph 7.1

22 November 2022

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

REPORT FROM THE SENIOR GOVERNOR

1. **PURPOSE OF THE PAPER**

1.1 This paper provides Court with a report from the Senior Governor.

1.2 This paper is for **information**.

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2. **RECOMMENDED ACTION**

2.1 The paper is for **information** and no action is required.

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3. **REPORT FROM SENIOR GOVERNOR**

3.1 I am pleased to present this update to Court on the key activities I have undertaken in my role as Senior Governor in the short time since our last meeting in October.

Internal Activities

3.2 I would like to take this opportunity to thank colleagues for their positive and constructive contributions during the Court Strategy meeting in October. The event was successful and provided us with the 'strategic thinking space' that is so essential in determining how, as governors, we can best support the University in achieving its strategic ambitions. The feedback which I have received from Court colleagues as part of our ongoing cycle of catch-up meetings has been helpful and I've shared that with members of the Senior Management Team.

3.3 In addition to meeting with Court members, I have continued to meet regularly with the Principal, Secretary and members of the Senior Management Team. These meetings are very helpful in ensuring open and transparent communication between the executive and governors and I am grateful to all for their participation. I encourage members to continue your own engagement with the Senior Management Team and vice-versa as those one to one dialogues are every bit important to those we have at the formal Court meetings. I have also met with the Chair of the Business Committee of the General Council to help maintain Court's links with that body which helps to represent our alumni community within the governance structure of the University.

3.4 I am keen to ensure that we continually review our processes and procedures to ensure that they provide us with the best possible support in ensuring an effective flow of business through the University's internal governance structure. In this connection, I warmly welcome the work which is ongoing within the Governance & Executive Support team to review the Court Committees cover paper template and I was pleased to contribute to that work, together with a sample group of other members.

3.5 I was delighted to represent Court at a reception that the Principal held to celebrate staff colleagues who had recently been promoted and enjoyed hearing about some of their work and their successes.

External Activities

3.8 I have held a number of meetings with a range of external stakeholders through the course of October and November, either in the form of one to ones or as workshop/conferences in which I have been involved and as part of which I've been able to promote the work of the University.

3.9 Prominent among these was a brief one to one meeting with the First Minister and separately with the Deputy First Minister. I have also met with the former Director General for the Economy for Scottish Government and attended the Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Women in Enterprise.

3.10 Within the University sector, I have had a positive conversation with Mike Cantlay, Scottish Funding Council Chair, and I can update Court members further on some of the issues we discussed when I present this report to Court. I have also held meetings with the new Chair of Heriot Watt University, with the Chair of Strathclyde University and I am attending the UK wide Committee of University Chairs Winter meeting in London on 15 November. The theme for the meeting is the future demands on higher education and will cover, amongst other sessions, presentations from the University and College Admissions Service on future UK demand, the board's role on academic assurance, and on student support. I will be able to report further to Court on any key points for Aberdeen that emerge from those discussions.

3.11 More broadly but still with relevance to the University I have been involved in chairing a number of events including a Skills Development Scotland Policy Forum, a Scottish National Investment Bank event for a range of investors with an interest in start ups including university spin-outs, and for Renewables UK. I am also attending the Bank of England's monthly briefings on monetary policy.

Conclusion

3.12 As we approach the end of another busy calendar year, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all colleagues on Court for their support and to wish everyone all the very best for the forthcoming festive season.

4. FURTHER INFORMATION

4.1 Further information is available from the Senior Governor, julie.ashworth@abdn.ac.uk.

9 November 2022

Confidentiality Status: Open

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

UPDATE ON THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR AND UNIVERSITY DEVELOPMENTS

1.   PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

1.1   This paper provides University Court with a brief overview of policy developments relating to higher education from early September until 10 November 2022, which are of particular relevance for the University of Aberdeen.

2.   PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	SMT Senate Audit and Risk Committee FRC	20 October 2022 2 November 8 November 10 November
Further consideration/ approval required by		

3.   RECOMMENDED ACTION

3.1   Court is invited to note the update.

4.   DISCUSSION

4.1   The following sections highlight key policy developments of relevance to the University and the higher education sector between September and November 2022.

DEVELOPMENTS SCOTLAND

5.   APPOINTMENT OF PRINCIPAL TO EXTERNAL ROLES

5.1   UCEA (the Universities and Colleges Employers Association) announced on 12 October that Professor George Boyne has been appointed the new chair of UCEA, succeeding Professor Mark E Smith who had held the position for the last seven years. UCEA's board provides oversight and strategic direction on employee experience and leadership of collective pay negotiations.

6.   SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT EMERGENCY BUDGET

6.1   The Deputy First Minister confirmed on 6 October that the Scottish Budget would be published on 15 December 2022 to ensure there is adequate time to prepare the budget after the Office of Budget Responsibility forecasts are published.

6.2   An expert panel providing advice to the Scottish Government as part of the Emergency Budget Review was confirmed on 29 September, with Sir Anton Muscatelli, Professor Frances Ruane and Professor Mike Brewer appointed to assess the impact on Scotland of the UK Chancellor's fiscal approach.

6.3   The Scottish Government reported the results of the Emergency Budget Review on 2 November 2022. It was emphasised that all additional funding would have to be found from existing budgets within the Scottish Budget. The review identified additional savings of £615M.

6.4   Professor George Boyne appeared before the Education, Children and Young People Committee on 28 September on behalf of Universities Scotland, to provide evidence as part of the Committee's pre-budget scrutiny. He emphasised the benefits of additional investment in the Scottish HE sector, highlighting the sector's reliance on cross-subsidy from international students to fund teaching of Scottish students as well as research, and the risks this presents to institutional sustainability. On 3 November the Committee published a letter to the Scottish Government to request further clarity from the Government on how it will ensure long-term

sustainability of the HE sector. Other key points included monitoring of Scotland's share of Research Council funding, support to widening access students, student access to housing, and funding for counselling support in colleges and universities.

6.5 Universities Scotland is working closely with the sector in the period leading up to the Scottish Budget being published, to highlight the financial challenges facing Scottish universities and to call for action to be taken by the Scottish Government to address underfunding of teaching and research.

7. SFC STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2027

7.1 The Scottish Funding Council published on 3 November its latest strategic plan: Building a connected, agile, sustainable tertiary education and research system in Scotland, setting out priorities for tertiary education until 2027. The strategy is structured around four key objectives: Enabling people to learn and flourish; Generating new ideas and diffusing knowledge; Building a responsive, coherent, sustainable system; and Making SFC an excellent organisation.

8. INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF SKILLS DELIVERY

8.1 An independent review of the skills delivery landscape in Scotland has been announced, aiming to explore how the public body and advisory landscape can be adapted to drive the Scottish Government's outcomes and ambitions for skills forward. James Withers has been appointed as Advisor to the Review. A call for evidence was announced on 28 October, seeking views from all interested parties to inform recommendations on the future of the skills delivery public body and advisory landscape, including the future of Skills Development Scotland. The consultation closes on 23 December.

9. INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF QUALIFICATIONS AND ASSESSMENT

9.1 The Scottish Government has also launched a consultation on the reform of qualifications and assessments to ensure fair recognition of learners' achievements, including views on assessments and the use of technology. The consultation opened on 21 October and closes on 16 December.

UK DEVELOPMENTS

10. TRADE UNIONS

10.1 The University and College Union (UCU) closed its ballots for industrial action on pay and work conditions (145 universities), and pensions (67 universities) on 21 October. University of Aberdeen staff who are union members were eligible to participate in both ballots. Because of the new aggregated ballots approach, a turnout of more than 50% across the UK member institutions with majority support would result in a sector-wide mandate for strike action. A turnout of 57.7% was achieved for the ballot on pay and work, with 81.1% prepared to take industrial action consisting of strike action, and a 60% turnout for the ballot on pensions, with 84.9% voting yes for strike action. UCU has announced three days of strike action: 24-25 November and 30 November, along with action short of a strike, starting on 23 November.

10.2 Unite also opened a staff ballot on 27 September, including cleaners, janitors, estates staff and technicians at the University of Aberdeen and 10 other Scottish universities. The ballot closed on 21 October and it has been confirmed that Aberdeen is not one of five universities achieving a mandate for strike action.

10.3 UNISON members, including cleaners, administrators, library, catering and security workers, at the University of Glasgow, Edinburgh Napier University and Robert Gordon University took part in strike action on 3 and 4 October. Further balloting at almost all other Scottish universities will take place later in the autumn.

11. JISC AND HESA

11.1 It was announced on 4 October that Jisc, the UK's digital body for tertiary education, and HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) had merged and that Jisc has been designated as the new body to collect and publish data on behalf of the Office for Students (OfS), taking this function over from HESA. This merger means the responsibility for collecting and publishing statutory data for all higher education providers across the UK now lies with Jisc.

12. NATIONAL SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL

12.1 The UK government announced on 12 October that a new National Science and Technology Council (NSTC) had been established, with responsibility for driving a UK sciences and technology strategy and acting as a "sustained engine for future economic growth, prosperity and security". The intention is for the new body to deliver a science and technology plan and to inform the sector about the government's priorities in this area. The NSTC will be chaired by the Prime Minister and the membership of the Council was announced on 3 November.

UNIVERSITY DEVELOPMENTS

13. RECENT STAFF AWARDS AND DISTINCTIONS

13.1 A number of grants have been awarded to University staff in autumn 2022, including:
- Dr Lucia D'Ambruoso, Senior Lecturer in the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, and her collaborators at the University of Birmingham and the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, have been awarded £2.9M from the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR) to improve access to injury care in low- and middle-income countries LMICs).
- A study led by Dr Josie Geris, Senior Lecturer in the School of Geoscience, has been awarded £0.5M from UKRI, to explore the most effective ways to expand the UK's trees, hedgerows, woodlands, and forests in rural and urban settings.
- Dr Mairead Black, Senior Clinical Lecturer, along with her research team, has been awarded almost £1M from NIHR to fund research looking into how pregnant women can be supported to plan their birth. The project is being taken forward by a collaborative team made up of scientists, clinicians, members of the public and those with lived experience of childbirth from across the UK and Ireland.
- The National Energy Skills Accelerator (NESA), a collaborative initiative between the University of Aberdeen, RGU and NESCol and supported by key partners Skills Development Scotland and Energy Transition Zone Ltd, has been awarded £1M from the Scottish Government. The project aims to provide the energy sector with the skills and talent to meet the challenges of the energy transition.
- Professor Dragan Jovcic in the School of Engineering has been awarded £75K from Scottish Enterprise for research into LC DC circuit breakers.
- Professor Angel Cuesta Ciscar in the School of Natural and Computing Sciences has been awarded £16K from the Carnegie Trust for a project entitled 'Enhanced electrocatalytic conversion of CO2 into useful chemicals: how and why do cations matter?'
- Professor Beth Scott and Dr Neda Trifonova, Research Fellow, in the School of Biological Sciences have been awarded £715K from NERC for a project called 'PELAgIO - Physics-to-Ecosystem Level Assessment of Impacts of OWF'.
- Professor Graeme Maclennan and Dr Kate Gillies, Reader, in the Health Services Research Unit have been awarded £1.1M from NIHR into a research project entitled 'The PARTIAL study – a randomised trial of clinical and cost effectiveness of PARTIAL vs total nephrectomy for clinically localised renal cell carcinoma'.
- Dr Lionel Broche in the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition has been awarded a grant from the European Commission totalling £265K for research into NMR relaxometry for biomedicine and advanced materials.
- Dr Sandra Telfer, Senior Research Fellow in the School of Biological Sciences has been awarded £145K from MRC for research into developing effective rodent control strategies to reduce disease risk in ecologically and culturally diverse rural landscapes.
- Dr Andrew Starkey and Dr Marcus Campbell Bannerman, both Senior Lecturers in the School of Engineering have been awarded £300K from Innovate UK for research into 'Life of Cable: Delivering company-wide digitalisation"

13.2 Research-related awards and recognition:
- Professor Pete Smith and researchers in the School of Biological Sciences were the winners of the Research with Impact – Institution award at the Green Gown Awards Ceremony held on 8 November. Held in association with UKRI, the Green Gown Awards recognise exceptional sustainability initiatives being undertaken by universities and colleges around the world. The University's Lighthouse Field Station (Professor Paul Thompson) also received a Highly Commended placement in the same category.

- Professor Alex Kemp, Director of the Aberdeen Centre for Research in Energy Economics and Finance in the Business School received the Lifetime Achievement Award for the Advancement of Education for Future Energy Leaders at the Abdullah bin Hamad Al Attiyah International Energy Awards in Doha on 12 October. The award was in recognition of his outstanding record of accomplishment and exceptional impact on the energy sector across his 57-yer career.
- Professor Muhammad Azizul Islam, Chair in Accountancy in the Business School, has been named winner of the Fair Trade and Sustainability category in the Scottish Fair Trade Awards 2022 in recognition of his work to improve the lives of garment workers in Bangladesh.
- A video game developed by Dr Jackson Armstrong and Dr William Hepburn in the School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History, has been nominated for the 2022 BAFTA Scotland Awards. 'Strange Sickness' is a digital narrative game inspired by Aberdeen's UNESCO-recognised Burgh Records which University historians have transcribed in a project that lasted a decade.
- Two University businesses have been shortlisted in the Scottish Funding Council's Converge Challenge, which aims to uncover emerging spinout and start-ups and act as a catalyst for accelerate the creation of innovative products and services. Former University of Aberdeen students Lasse Rasmussen and Elliot Martens are finalists in the Create Challenge, with their Aberdeen-based Two Raccoons which uses soft fruit waste from the hospitality sector to make wine; and Christopher Solomon, representing Zephyrus Aerolabs Ltd has been shortlisted in the Net Zero Challenge for their technology developments in the areas of remote real-time emission monitoring of uncontrolled emissions of harmful gasses. The results will be announced in Edinburgh in November.

13.3 Other research and innovation-related successes include:
- The University of Aberdeen will showcase its research at COP27 in Egypt 6-18 November, with Professor David Burslem, Interdisciplinary Director for Environment and Biodiversity, Frans de Vries, Chair in Environmental and Resource Economics, Karendeep Sidhu, PhD student in the School of Biological Sciences, and Adam Lambert, AUSA Vice-President for Activities, attending the event.
- The University's alliance with Curtin University in Australia and the University of Calgary in Canada was formally launched at a breakfast even in Barcelona in September. The partnership will develop innovative solutions to tackle key global issues, including the need to ensure a just energy transition while tackling climate change and securing a sustainable future.
- The University has announced an investment of nearly £4M to recruit 20 experts to address the key global challenges facing society. The campaign message: "Where great minds come together", reflects the University's focus on interdisciplinary teaching and research. The positions, supported by funding from the Development Trust, will strengthen work towards the Aberdeen 2040 Strategy and are based around five themed areas: Energy Transition, Environment and Biodiversity, Health, Nutrition and Wellbeing, Social Inclusion and Cultural Diversity, and Data and AI.
- The National Decommissioning Centre (NDC) and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) signed in September a three-year collaborative research agreement which is the first of its kind between the nuclear and oil and gas decommissioning sectors. The partnership will support research with a potential value of up to £900,000 and will see researchers from the University of Aberdeen work with the NDA in areas of mutual interest to the two sectors, including decarbonisation of decommissioning activities, economic impacts, cost benchmarking and remote operations in hazardous environments.
- The north-east's world-leading contribution to nutrition was celebrated when the Rowett Institute welcomed the public through its doors to mark 100 years since it officially opened. Visitors at the open day on 10 September had the opportunity to learn first-hand what it is like to be a research volunteer taking part in a study at the Rowett.
- Researchers from the Just Transition Lab presented research projects and discussed the current energy crisis with Richard Lochhead, Scottish Government Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work, during a visit to campus in early September.
- Dr Rachel Shanks, senior lecturer in the School of Education attended a Roundtable at the Scottish Parliament on 22 September to set out a series of recommendations based

on her research into risking school uniform costs and a postcode lottery when it comes to accessing financial support.

14.   EDUCATION-RELATED ACHIEVEMENTS

14.1 Key education-related achievements this autumn include:

- As part of the sector-wide [Resilient Learning Communities Theme for 2020-23](#), QAA is running a Student-Led project for 2022 which explores equity and inclusiveness in an increasingly diverse student population and how best to provide support to student. [Five of the nine case studies published](#) on the QAA website relating to Equity are University of Aberdeen projects:
    - Dr Stuart Durkin and Dr Joy Perkins, School of Social Science: Improving equity through virtual learning project
    - Dr Mintu Nath and Professor Steve Tucker, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition: An interactive application to conduct dose-response analysis in a self-directed learning environment
    - Dr Joy Perkins, Centre for Academic Development: The equity of infographics in accessible learning
    - Dr Morgiane Richard, Professor Ben Martin, Professor Nir Oren, and Dr Murilo Baptista: Investigating solutions to make mathematical teaching content accessible
    - Pre-sessional English team: Using Twitter to promote digital literacy
- As part of ongoing enhancement of our Learning and Teaching Enhancement Programme (LTEP) initiative, the University has recently awarded a total of £16,000 across nine projects to support our work relating to the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland Enhancement Theme, Resilient Learning Communities, which is in its third year. These projects represent a broad range of Schools from across the University and cover various areas relating to the enhancement theme, including widening participation, articulation, international student support, ethics and the global classroom. These varied and innovative projects all have students as coordinating partners and add to the 13 other LTEP projects that have been funded in the last two years.
- As Court knows, the University successfully bid for an international higher education conference ([HETL](#)) which will be held at TECA in June 2023. We are now in the process of seeking abstracts across the four themes which directly link to our Aberdeen 2040 Strategy: Sustainable, Interdisciplinary, International, Inclusive.
- Professor Steven Tucker from the School of Medicine, Medical Science and Nutrition has led a project through the British Pharmacological Society to develop and enhance their undergraduate curriculum. Alongside the 2-year development of learning objectives, suggested assessments and supportive resources to aid delivery of the curriculum, Prof Tucker has also been involved in developing principles for its inclusive delivery. The curriculum package launched last week through the British Pharmacological Society website and will feature at the BPS annual conference in Liverpool next week.

15.   FURTHER INFORMATION

15.1 Further information is available from George Boyne, Principal and Vice-Chancellor (boyne@abdn.ac.uk) and Hulda Sveinsdottir, Director of Planning (hulda.sveinsdottir@abdn.ac.uk).

11 November 2022

Confidentiality Status: *Open*

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

STRATEGIC RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE – RISK APPETITE STATEMENT

1   PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

1.1   This report provides Court with an update on risk appetite at University level, and includes a proposed University Statement on Risk Appetite, developed following a workshop held with Court on 22 March 2022, and input from the University's Audit and Risk Committee (ARC), when it met in September 2022. On approval, the agreed Statement will be included within the University's Risk Management Framework as part of a dedicated section on risk appetite.

2   PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	SMT	7 November 2022
Further consideration/approval required by	Court	22 November 2022

3   RECOMMENDED ACTION

3.1   Court is invited to:

- **Consider and approve** the University's draft Statement on Risk Appetite, passing comment as appropriate.
- **Consider and approve** the appetite ratings proposed for individual risk areas.

4   UNIVERSITY STATEMENT ON RISK APPETITE

4.1.   Background and Context

In March 2022, University Court held a workshop on risk management, with a specific focus on risk appetite. This was held with a view to establishing a new University Statement on Risk Appetite for inclusion in the University's Risk Management Framework; recently updated prior to that as part of a review with PwC into the University's wider risk management arrangements, which concluded in 2021. This review also led to substantive changes to the University's Strategic Risk Register and its constituent risk areas. The new Statement on Risk Appetite will replace the equivalent statement included in the previous iteration of the Framework document.

At the workshop, Court members were split into four groups, with each group asked to apply a broad risk appetite profile to all 14 individual risk areas that comprise the University's Strategic Risk Register. Each group was asked to create an appetite profile for each area by plotting two points within a matrix, under five categories (see Table 1 overleaf). The categories were: Avoid, Averse, Moderate, Open and High (*Note: a definition for each these categories is provided in Appendix 1, as given to Court members at the workshop; this also aligns appetite categories to risk scores. It is intended that these will be adopted as part of the University's Risk Management Framework on approval of proposals made below*). To help facilitate the process and to stimulate ideas, each group was also given an aide which highlighted potential sub-risks and specific issues or topics for consideration within each risk area, thereby ensuring that all groups would take account of the breadth and diversity of different risks within each area.

Since the exercise, the University received feedback from its Audit and Risk Committee on proposals for risk appetite, in addition to advice previously given by PwC; this has all been taken into account here. In addition, the University has sought to benchmark its proposals against arrangements for risk appetite in place at other institutions across the sector; this has included liaison with other universities within the Wesley Group, and accessing information other Scottish universitities – to the extent it is available. This included the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, along with Strathclyde and RGU.

4.2. Court Workshop - Proposed Risk Appetite Parameters

On completion of the exercise at the Court Workshop in March 2022, there were inevitable differences in the profiles created by each group; for example, where one group might propose a range of *Avoid to Moderate* for a specific risk area, another might suggest *Averse to Open*. In particular, this applied to Financial Sustainability, where suggested ratings ranged from *Avoid to Averse*, to *Moderate to Open*. Similarly under Estates and Facilities, suggestions ranged from *Avoid to Moderate*, to *Averse to High*. However, on balance across all risk areas, there were also general trends, as demonstrated in Table 1, which shows the average rating proposed across the four groups for each risk area on the day (*noting the average rating shown for each risk area in the table follows an analysis of the results by the Directorate of Planning*). In short, while a number of risk areas had a proposed starting position of *Avoid* – reflecting the nature of specific elements within those risk areas - the prevailing approach in most cases was to allocate an appetite profile ranging from *Averse to Open*. More detailed commentary follows the table below.

Table 1: Risk Appetite Profiles – Collective Court Position

Risk Area	Avoid	Averse	Moderate	Open	High
Financial Sustainability	█	█	█	█	
Estates and Facilities		█	█		
Student Recruitment			█	█	
Education (UG and PGT)	█	█	█	█	
Research and PGR		█	█	█	█
Digital and Information Services	█	█	█	█	
People		█	█	█	
Health, Safety and Wellbeing	█	█			
International Partnerships			█	█	█
Reputation		█	█		
External Environment		█	█		
Environmental Sustainability			█	█	█
Leadership and Governance	█	█			
AUSA and Third Parties			█	█	

- For a number of risks - **Financial Sustainability, Education (UG and PGT), Digital and Information Services, Health, Safety and Wellbeing, and Leadership and Governance** – there was broad consensus that within each, there are certain activities where the University would seek to **_Avoid_** risk to whatever extent possible. In particular, this applies to those aspects within each area that are subject to legal or regulatory requirements; for example, the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) under **Health, Safety and Wellbeing**, or the Higher Education Code of Governance, under **Leadership and Governance**. It is also notable that for these two risk areas in particular, there was consensus on a more stringent appetite rating, with the range suggested for each averaging from *Avoid to Averse*. This again reflects the nature of both of these risk areas; the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students is

paramount to the University, while strong, effective and robust leadership and governance arrangements are essential to the effective running of any organisation.

- **For the other three risk areas which sit under *Avoid* as a starting point, the range was much broader**; in all three cases, reflecting the diversity of potential risks the University might face within each area. For example, under **Financial Sustainability**, risks can relate to issues as diverse as institutional pension contributions, to major investment in capital projects. The position under **Digital** is similar, with effort made to avoid risk to whatever extent possible in key areas like cyber security and information governance, while taking a more open approach to investment and the use of digital technologies. Under **Education**, the University will seek to avoid any risk pertaining to quality and academic standards, but may be more open to taking risks with initiatives to improve the student experience, for example.

- **For all other risk areas, the general trend was for a rating of *Averse to Open***, reflecting that in most aspects of each of these areas, the potential to avoid risk completely is not feasible, and the need to take risk in the pursuit of opportunities may be necessary or indeed desirable. In particular, this applies to **Research and PGR, International Partnerships and Environmental Sustainability**, where the appetite for taking risk extends from *Averse to High*. This again reflects the nature and breadth of activities under each of these areas. For example, under **Research and PGR**, there is an aversion to incurring risk in areas like research governance, while in contrast, the appetite for taking risks linked to enterprise and innovation will be high. Appetite is also *High* under **International Partnerships**, noting such partnership agreements represent opportunities the University has chosen to pursue, which by their nature and complexity require a high-risk appetite. Under **Environmental Sustainability**, a high-risk appetite reflects the need for ambitious and innovative solutions which will likely incur risk, if the University is to be successful in achieving its net-zero ambitions.

4.3. Proposed University Statement on Risk Appetite

Based on the above, it is recommended that the University's overarching risk appetite profile is agreed as *Open*; with the caveat that where potential risks across all areas may significantly threaten the health, safety or wellbeing of staff or students, University legislative or regulatory requirements, the financial health of the organisation, or may cause reputational harm, then University will be risk averse, or may seek to avoid risk completely. With this in mind, the following is also proposed as a University Statement on Risk Appetite to be applied as an overarching approach at institutional level, for approval. If approved, this statement will be formally adopted and integrated as part of the University's Risk Management Framework, in addition to the appetite category descriptors included under Appendix 1.

"The University's Risk Management Framework defines Risk Appetite as *the level of risk it is willing to accept in the pursuit of its objectives*.

The University acknowledges that in order to achieve its strategic ambitions, there is a requirement to accept varying levels of risk in different areas. The levels of exposure will change depending on the nature of different activities the University is required to undertake, or on the opportunities it chooses to pursue; meaning its appetite for accepting risk will also vary, contingent on these different factors.

However, while the University's risk appetite parameters will vary depending on the area of business under consideration, it will always avoid or seek to minimise, through robust and controlled management, any activity that has the potential to cause the University significant financial, regulatory, legal or reputational harm, to endanger the health, safety or wellbeing of University staff or students, or to affect its ability to achieve its strategic priorities. These factors will be prioritised over any other consideration, including in areas where opportunities are commonly pursued, and the University is open to greater exposure.

Taking account of this, **the University's Risk Appetite at a strategic level is defined as "*Open*"**. This means that, while maintaining an aversion to risk where appropriate, the University is also open to the acceptance of risk in the pursuit of opportunities, where they underpin its strategic ambitions, and in turn, where on balance, there is confidence that the projected benefits are realistic and achievable, and that they outweigh any potential for significant harm."

4.4. Proposed Risk Appetite Ratings for Individual Risk Areas

In addition to the overarching statement proposed at institutional level, it is also recommended that the appetite ratings shown in Table 2, below, are applied to each risk area; noting this has been informed by the appetite profiles generated via the Court workshop, shown in Table 1. If approved, this would also be factored into the Risk Management Framework. These ratings come with the same caveat as above; that even where a risk area has an appetite of *Moderate, Open* or *High*, if a specific risk within that area carries the potential to cause significant financial, regulatory, legal or reputational harm, or to endanger the health, safety or wellbeing of University staff or students, then the University will seek to minimise that risk, or to avoid that risk completely.

On approval, these ratings will be used as a subjective tool to inform the decision-making of Risk Owners and Managers within each respective area when considering risk, and when weighing up opportunities; consequently these ratings will serve as guidance. This approach was previously endorsed by PwC, reflecting the nature of risk management within the sector; whereby the assessment of risk is predominantly a subjective or qualitative exercise, rather than data-driven.

Table 2: Risk Appetite Ratings for Individual Risk Areas

Risk Area	Appetite Rating
Financial Sustainability	Open
Estates and Facilities	Moderate
Student Recruitment	Open
Education (UG and PGT)	Open
Research and PGR	High
Digital and Information Services	Open
People	Open
Health, Safety and Wellbeing	Averse
International Partnerships	High
Reputation	Moderate
External Environment	Moderate
Environmental Sustainability	High
Leadership and Governance	Averse
AUSA and Third Parties	Open

5. NEXT STEPS

5.1 On approval by Court, and pending any additional steps agreed or changes required, the University's Risk Management Framework will be updated with a dedicated section on risk appetite, and formally issued to all Risk Owners and Managers to inform and to guide decision-making within their respective areas.

6. FURTHER INFORMATION

6.1 Further information is available from Tracey Slaven, University Secretary and Chief Operating Officer, tracey.slaven@abdn.ac.uk and Hulda Sveinsdottir, Director of Planning and Governance, hulda.sveinsdottir@abdn.ac.uk. or Iain Grant, Head of Strategic Planning and Head of Project Management Office, i.grant@abdn.ac.uk.

8 November 2022

Confidentiality Status: Open

Risk Appetite Category	Scoring Range	Description
Avoid	**1-3**	Unwilling to accept risk in this area to whatever extent possible; threats posed will have the potential to cause significant damage to the University, either in terms of compliance, health and safety, reputation or financial sustainability. Detailed and robust plans for risk mitigation and control must be in place.
Averse	**4 - 6**	Prepared to accept only low levels of risk, with limited appetite for pursing high-risk activities. Where risks are accepted, potential benefits should be significant, with rigorous controls in place to limit the potential for harm. Court approval required where risks are accepted as a consequence of pursing objectives.
Moderate	**8**	Pursuit of opportunities is encouraged where the outcomes and projected benefits support the University's strategic vision. The risk identification and management process must be robust, with controls and mitigations in place, and clear processes for monitoring and control established.
Open	**9**	Willing to consider all projects or activities to achieve objectives, even where there are elevated levels of associated risk and where failure is possible. The projected benefits should be significant, and in line with institutional objectives. Reasonable measures for monitoring and control of risk should be in place.
High	**12-16**	Risk taking is encouraged in the pursuit of opportunities and objectives, through original, creative, pioneering projects or activities, providing due diligence is applied with risk controls in place. The chance of failure can be high and will be tolerated, providing on balance that the potential returns or benefits are significant.

22 November 2022

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

ANTIRACISM STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

1.   PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

1.1   The purpose of this paper is to present the high-level Antiracism Strategy Implementation Plan, attached at Appendix 1. The paper is for information.

1.2   The Antiracism Strategy was formally launched in October 2022 following approval by Court. The Strategy provides a bold framework for progressing race equality in the University and was developed through extensive consultation undertaken internally and external to the University.

1.3   The Implementation Plan provides a framework for the activities associated with ensuring the Antiracism Strategy is actively embedded in the University and sets out the approach to monitoring the progress of the Strategy. The Implementation Plan will be supported by the development of a comprehensive Antiracism Strategy Action Plan to be launched in December 2022.

2.   PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee	23 May 2022
	Race Equality Strategy Group	27 June 2022
	SMT	7 November 2022
Further consideration/ approval required by		

3.   RECOMMENDED ACTION

3.1   Court is invited to note the information in the paper and the Antiracism Strategy Implementation Plan.

4.   DISCUSSION

4.1   BACKGROUND

The University launched a bold and progressive Antiracism Strategy in October 2022, following approval from Court. The Strategy provides a set of high-level strategic aims to drive the creation of an antiracist University.

The Strategy is the culmination of two years' work, over which time the University has been engaging in race listening activities with staff and students and working with external partners such as Advance HE and local organisations as part of the Antiracism Roundtable instigated by the University.

As part of its discussion on the Antiracism Strategy, Court requested to receive the Antiracism Strategy Implementation Plan, and this is shared at Appendix 1. It can be noted that the Antiracism Strategy Implementation Plan sets out how Court will be kept updated as to the progress made in addressing the actions set out in the Antiracism Strategy.

The Antiracism Strategy Implementation Plan provides a timeline for key activities associated with the Antiracism Strategy related to action planning, consultation, communication and monitoring arrangements.

4.2   ANTIRACISM STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

The first significant step in the Antiracism Strategy Implementation Plan is the development of the Antiracism Strategy *Action Plan*, which will set out specific actions related to each section of the Strategy and will be available for publication in December 2022.

The Action Plan will reflect actions which have arisen through the University's race listening activities, the recommendations from the Equality and Human Rights Commission 2019 report Tackling racial harassment: universities challenged and UUK 2021 report Tackling racial harassment in higher education and the priority themes arising from the analysis of the results of the Race Equality Charter staff and student surveys undertaken in 2022. The survey results have provided insightful data into the challenges faced by staff and students from Racialised Groups. The results of the surveys will be released to staff and students on 16 November as part of an antiracism communications approach which places an emphasis on transparency.

4.3   RACE LITERACY TRAINING – FRONTLINE STAFF AND COURT

As part of its consideration of the Antiracism Strategy in March 2022, Court helpfully noted the importance of providing high-quality training for staff, particularly related to ensuring staff are equipped to appropriately handle a disclosure of a racist incident. This has been progressed through a recent procurement exercise to identify a training provider to deliver this training to 120 frontline staff in Phase 1. The training will take place at the start of 2023 and builds on the race literacy training offered to staff and the Senior Management Team in 2021 and 2022.

The procurement also included an invitation to tender to deliver further training for Court members to provide an opportunity to reflect on racial equality in the Higher Education and Scottish contexts, terminology, the steps required to achieve and lead an antiracist university and the role of Court members in understanding how to ensure Court business is reviewed with reference to antiracism principles. Details of this training opportunity will be shared with Court members in due course.

Court is invited to note the high-level Antiracism Strategy Implementation Plan at Appendix 1.

5.   FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information is available from Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal Education ruth.taylor@abdn.ac.uk or Janine Chalmers, Head of Organisational Development janine.chalmers@abdn.ac.uk

3 November 2022

Confidentiality Status: Open

Appendix 1

University of Aberdeen

Antiracism Strategy 2022-2025

High-level Implementation Plan

Overview

The University's Antiracism Strategy was approved by University Court in March 2022. The Strategy provides a bold framework, supported by Aberdeen 2040, for creating an antiracist University through the following themes:

- Leadership, Accountability and Governance
- Voices of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Staff and Students
- Embedding Antiracism across the University Community
- Attracting, Appointing and Nurturing Talent
- Diversifying the Curriculum and Closing the Awarding Gap
- Research
- Reporting Racism and Support Structures

The purpose of this Implementation Plan is to provide an overview of how the Strategy, specifically the commitments and actions within it, will be implemented and monitored across the University. Critical aspects of the Strategy's implementation will be:

- **Race Action Plan** – this will be the foundation of the implementation of the Strategy. It will operationalise the strategic framework and stipulate metrics by which the Strategy can be measured and timeframes. It will also reflect the consultation undertaken in advance of the development of the Strategy, as well as the issues identified through the Race Equality Charter staff and student surveys.
- **Communication and consultation activities** - the University's race listening activities actively contributed to the development and approach of the Antiracism Strategy. These will be ongoing, both through formal and informal routes. It will be critical for the University to regularly 'check-in' with students and staff from Racialised Groups to ensure that the Strategy is supporting the change it was designed to deliver. This will be undertaken through focus groups, engagement with our networks (both internal and external) and surveys.
- **Race Equality Strategy Group** – the Group will be responsible for monitoring the progress of the Strategy, working closely with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee as well as the Senior Management Team who has overall responsibility for the Strategy.
- **Collaboration** – the Strategy adopts a 'whole-University' approach. This will manifest in taking steps to ensure that all staff and students are aware of the Strategy, their responsibilities and the actions they can take individually to support an antiracist environment.
- **Flexibility** - the Strategy and this Implementation Plan are 'living' documents. They will be modified and updated to align with progress, national and local conversations on race-related matters and current approaches related to terminology.

The Antiracism Strategy will be implemented through a robust governance structure, with full support from the Senior Management Team and with input from staff and students. This Implementation Plan will be shared with appropriate groups and will provide a basis for embedding a structure which fosters transparent reporting of progress.

<u>Abbreviations</u>

EDIC	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee
REC	Race Equality Charter
RESG	Race Equality Strategy Group
SMT	Senior Management Team

Action	Timeline	Responsible	Comments	Status
Launch of the Antiracism Strategy	June 2022	VP Education/ Human Resources	Launch to be supported by an accessible video highlighting the Strategy's key themes and the views of staff and students on the impact the Strategy will have for them and the University's antiracism work. Communications to staff, students, Heads of School, and Directors will be sent. Race Equality Champions to support awareness-raising in their areas.	The Strategy was uploaded to the University's website in June 2022 and a formal communication launching the Strategy to all staff and students was sent in October 2022, along with a supporting video.
Antiracism Strategy Action Plan approved	November 2022	RESG/ Human Resources	The Action Plan will form the basis of the implementation of the Strategy, identifying key priority areas, timescales and providing a mechanism for monitoring progress. It will reflect actions arising from survey analysis, as well as listening activities and wider consultations internally and external to the University.	On track
Monitoring of the Antiracism Strategy Action Plan	RESG meetings from December 2022	Human Resources/ RESG	Regular monitoring of progress allows early identification of barriers and challenges met in the completion of actions.	On track
Six-monthly reviews of progress reported to Senior Management Team and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee	First review December 2022 (then every 6 months)	Human Resources/ EDIC/ SMT	An intern has been recruited to develop a master digital EDI action plan monitoring system which will enable effective monitoring of the progress made towards the completion of EDI action plans, including the Antiracism Strategy Action Plan. This high-level reporting will be shared with EDIC and SMT.	On track
Annual progress report to Court	June 2023 and annually	VP Education/ Human Resources	This report will be part of the annual report which Court receives in relation to the progress made towards the Public Sector Equality Duty.	On track
Race listening activities. Staff and student focus groups, Antiracism Roundtable and engagement with sectoral groups	2022 – 2025	Human Resources/ RESG	Listening activities will enable RESG to hear the views of and engage proactively with staff and students from all racialised groups, internal networks (e.g., Race Equality Network, AUSA Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students Forum) and external stakeholders (e.g., HEIs, local partners, relevant societies)	Ongoing race listening activities will be scheduled. Focus groups will be organised to discuss the results of the Race Equality Charter surveys 2022. Antiracism Roundtable will

| | | | Outcomes will be reported on a 6-monthly basis to RESG, EDIC and SMT, and annually to Court.

Antiracism Strategy Action Plan to capture emerging actions identified through listening activities | meet for the third time in November, to consolidate issues shared to date and to identify actions. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| REC surveys to be issued to staff and students to assess impact of the Strategy and success against priorities and to benchmark progress | Feb 2022 (biannually) | Human Resources | The purpose of the REC surveys is to assess the culture of the University and identify whether racial inequalities exist.

Outcomes to be reported to RESG, EDIC and SMT, and to Court (as a part of the annual report).

Antiracism Strategy Action Plan to be refreshed to incorporate themes identified through the surveys. | REC staff and student surveys were issued to staff and students in February 2022. The results have been reviewed by SMT and RESG and they will be shared with staff and students in November 2022. The results provide direction as to the University's priorities in this area and will feed into the Antiracism Strategy Action Plan. |
| Aberdeen 2040 Inclusive Open Sessions to include progress made against the Strategy | Annually | VP Education/ SMT/ External Relations | 'Inclusive' theme is at the core of Aberdeen 2040.

It is paramount that progress made as well as challenges met are clearly communicated to staff and students | An Inclusive Open Session for all staff, with a focus on race equality, was held in February 2022. Further sessions to be scheduled. |

22 November 2022

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

OUTCOME AGREEMENT WITH THE SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL (SFC) FOR 2022/23

1. **PURPOSE OF THE PAPER**

> 1.1 **This paper provides Court with the University's Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) for 2022/23, noting associated documents are also enclosed.** This was approved by the Senior Management Team when it met on 7 November 2022. The final iteration is due for submission to the SFC by their deadline of 5 December 2022. It should be noted that while these documents are in final form, they may be subject to minor changes prior to submitting to SFC.

2. **PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY / FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED**

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously approved by	SMT	7 November 2022
Further approval required by	Court	22 November 2022

3. **RECOMMENDED ACTION**

> 3.1 Court is invited to **consider and approve** the University's Outcome Agreement for 2022/23 along with the appended documentation.

4. **SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS**

4.1 The approach this year specified by the SFC was to capture at a high level, the deliverables, impacts, and outcomes from each university against a set of defined priorities, and to give assurance on the use of allocated funding in AY 2022/23. This Agreement is designed to provide that assurance, comprehensively demonstrating how the University has addressed the priority areas identified by the SFC. The Priority areas covered are:

- Fair access and transitions, which includes the Commission on Widening Access.
- Quality learning and teaching.
- Learning with impact, ensuring students are equipped and ready to take up appropriate employment in the future on completion of their studies.
- Student participation and engagement in their educational experience.
- Coherent Learning Provision, with a focus on how institutions are using data and intelligence, and engaging with stakeholders to adapt, develop and align provision to meet the needs of business, industry and stakeholders.
- Fair Work, and what universities are doing to deliver Fair Work practices for their employees and through their procurement.
- Equalities and inclusion.
- High quality research and innovation.
- Climate Emergency.

4.2 A total of five appendices are also enclosed, as required by the SFC in line with their guidance. These documents are also for approval, in addition to the main Outcome Agreement:

- **Appendix 1**, the Table of Measures;
- **Appendix 2**, the University's Self-Evaluation for the Interim Outcome and Impact Framework agreed with the SFC for 2021/22;
- **Appendix 3**, the University's Innovation Fund report which relates to Knowledge

Exchange activities.
- **Appendix 4**, Research Case Study "Affordable school uniforms: safeguarding Scottish children's right to education"
- **Appendix 5**, Research Case Study "Soil science excellence leading to global impact"

4.3 Additional points to note are:

- As above, there may be adjustments to the main document post-Court, as pending or additional information is submitted and then integrated. However, if there are any amendments, they will be minor rather than substantive.

- The Table of Measures is defined by the SFC and includes the key metrics against which progress will be measured over the coming year. As with last year, it is again focused on a smaller subset of prioritised metrics. Of note, the data to 2020-21 was provided by the SFC via HESA; the data for 2021-22 has been generated internally by the University, where available, and is currently provisional, potentially subject to minor amendments. The student population data provided for 2022-23 is projected and therefore indicative, based on the October 2022 Snapshot 1 and is likewise subject to change. The remaining figures provided for 2022-23 are targets set by the University, which are intended to be both ambitious yet realistic, as requested by the SFC. This covers data for non-continuation, the NSS and Graduate Outcomes.

- The Self-Evaluation provides a narrative commentary on the University's performance against the Outcome and Impact Framework agreed with the SFC for 2021-22. It is structured to reflect the guidance and information requested by the SFC, and includes a summary of performance year on year from 2019-20 to 2020-21 against the measures included in the refined Table of Measures over that period.

- The University Innovation Fund report is in a standard format, and provides an overview of how the University is focusing and prioritising its knowledge exchange and innovation activities on the wider regional and national economic and social recovery from Covid-19. This document will also be subject to amendment pre-Court, with refinements due to be made to format, and to trim to within four pages.

- Following approval by Court, this document will be amended if or where required, and submitted to the SFC by their deadline of 5 December 2021. Following submission and sign-off by the SFC, the Agreement will be published on the SFC website in the Spring of 2023, along with those developed by all other Scottish universities. It will also be made available on the University's website.

5. FURTHER INFORMATION

5.1 Further information is available from Tracey Slaven, University Secretary & Chief Operating Officer (tracey.slaven@abdn.ac.uk), Hulda Sveinsdottir, Director of Planning (hulda.sveinsdottir@abdn.ac.uk) or Iain Grant, Head of Strategic Planning (i.grant@abdn.ac.uk).

11 November 2022
Confidentiality Status: Open

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

OUTCOME AGREEMENT

2022-2023

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

This is the University of Aberdeen's Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) for 2022-23. It sets out the University's commitments to delivering outcomes prioritised by the Scottish Government via the SFC, relating to Students, Research, and to Economic Recovery and Social Renewal. This is the University's first Outcome and Impact Framework since Covid-19 rules and restrictions were lifted in Scotland. It comes at a time when the University, as with the wider sector, focuses not just on its post-pandemic recovery, but on mitigating a growing cost-of-living crisis which has arisen as a consequence of various national and international events, including Brexit and Putin's war in Ukraine. This document therefore outlines key measures taken by the University in response to these challenging environmental factors across the areas identified by the SFC; focusing not least on supporting the health, safety, and wellbeing of the University community.

This ethos is underpinned by the University's Aberdeen 2040 strategy, launched in February 2020, just prior to the onset of Covid-19 in the UK. With its focus on Education and Research, and the four strategic themes of Inclusive, Interdisciplinary, International and Sustainable, it sets out 20, high-level commitments to be delivered over the coming years; providing a framework to the University for its longer-term contributions to recovery from the pandemic and to society more broadly, as every effort is made to collectively navigate these challenging times. In this regard, the University is pleased to note that despite the challenges faced in recent years, its ability to work towards its strategic commitments has remained undimmed; reflected in key measures like the National Student Survey (NSS) where it now ranks 4th in the UK and 2nd in Scotland, and across different league tables, where it now ranks inside the UK top 20 in two of the three primary domestic measures.

Taking account of this wider context, this Agreement focuses on how the University will continue to address the key areas and priority outcomes identified by the Scottish Government via the SFC, in line with its own strategic priorities. It covers the following areas:

- **Outcomes for Students**
  - Fair Access and Transitions
  - High Quality Learning, Teaching and Support
  - Partnership, Participation and Student Experience
  - Learning with Impact
  - Equalities and Inclusion

- **Outcomes for Research**
  - Research Excellence
  - Research Sustainability, incorporating collaboration

- **Outcomes for Economic Recovery and Social Renewal**
  - Responsive Institutions
  - Confident and Highly Capable – Work Ready Graduates
  - Knowledge Exchange and Innovation
  - Collaboration
  - Climate Emergency

It should be noted at the outset that while this document focuses primarily on the Scottish context, the strategies, actions, standards, and services taken forward and provided by the University to staff and students, are also applied to staff and students studying as part of the University's provision in Qatar, and other TNE initiatives such as the University's partnership with South China Normal University (SCNU), where applicable.

The Table of Measures provided by the SFC at the start of the exercise is attached as **Appendix 1**. This provides up-to-date data against each measure included by the SFC this year, with projections made against each for 2022/23. The University's Self-Evaluation for the 2021-22 Outcome and Impact Framework document, is attached as **Appendix 2**. The University's Innovation Fund (UIF) report is also attached as required as **Appendix 3**. Any queries in relation to this Outcome Agreement or the affiliated documentation should be directed to the University's Director of Planning or the Head of Strategic Planning in the first instance, via planning@abdn.ac.uk.

2. POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY

"We recognise that colleges and universities are operating in a challenging environment, working towards recovery following the pandemic period, and that institutions are continuing to deliver a responsive learning approach, ensuring the well-being of students and staff, and delivering an education-led economic recovery for Scotland."

As the sector and society more broadly continues its post-pandemic recovery, the University remains focused on delivering a responsive and flexible learning approach, which underpins an education-led economic recovery in Scotland and within the wider UK. In parallel, the University retains its focus on ensuring the well-being of its staff and students, reflecting the first Commitment made under the Inclusive theme of its Aberdeen 2040 strategy, referenced above. The range of measures and initiatives undertaken by the University across each of these areas are outlined in relative depth throughout this document, where relevant.

Moreover, the following examples of support services or functions specific to Covid-19 that remain in place should be noted; they are designed to provide up-to-date information to the University community on Covid where applicable, and to ensure rapid response to potential threats relating to Covid, in the event that they emerge.

- A continued dedicated webpage for Covid-19 allowing for the publication of up-to-date information and access to support services for students and staff;
- Guidance specific to Covid-19 also remains in place online for specific student cohorts, including the international student-base;
- Provision has been made in relation to promotions to accommodate for people whose work was affected by Covid-19;
- The University's Covid-19 Campus Planning Group (CPG) continues to operate; this has become a standing group, which meets if or when issues or risks arise that require discussion;
- Excellent links with NHS Grampian specific to Covid-19 and other issues remain in place and will be maintained;
- Work is ongoing to enhance wellbeing support, and to implement a wellbeing strategy for staff post pandemic, recognising that there have been challenges for some in the return to campus;
- Ongoing fortnightly meetings with Trade Unions to discuss any matters arising.

3.   OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS

3.1.   FAIR ACCESS AND TRANSITIONS

"Education is accessible to students from all backgrounds and students at all levels are supported through successful pathways"

3.1.1.   People from deprived areas have fair access and are supported to succeed

The University continues to offer a range of programmes that provide pre-entry support for students from all widening access (WA) backgrounds. This includes ensuring that prospective students are aware of the varied opportunities available to facilitate access to Higher Education, of the support arrangements the University has in place, and of the experience had by other students from different widening access backgrounds. Specific examples of the suite of support available and being implemented are as follows:

- Continued development and deployment of contextualised admissions and advanced standing articulation routes to enhance access to university study;
- Implementation of enhanced Bridging Programmes to support access and transition to HE, across a wider range of discipline areas, including Biology, Physics for Engineering and a combined Arts course, all at SCQF Level 7;
- In partnership with others, drawing together Access to High Demand Professions (AHDP) (REACH); Schools Higher Education Programme (SHEP) (AspireNorth); and ACES to Creative Education in Scotland (led by RGU) under the umbrella of SFC's National Schools Engagement Programme;
- Providing scholarships and other means of support to students for whom tuition fees and other costs relating to study may be a barrier to entry, progression, and success. This includes the continuation of free accommodation for first year UG SIMD20 students with any remaining spaces allocated to Free School Meals applicants, upskilling support for study, and regional PGT Scholarships.

As UCAS has now included a WA metrics table, the University is developing its digital systems to ensure appropriate data capture, with particular focus on the Free School Meals (FSM) data. Following the capture of FSM as a WA metric, the University will be adapting promotional materials and activities to reflect this recognition.

3.1.2.   Care-experienced people have fair access and are supported to succeed

As a corporate parent the University of Aberdeen is fully committed to supporting care-experienced people.

The University is proud to have achieved the Buttle UK Quality Mark for Care Leavers in recognition of its commitment in this space. The University has a range of support mechanisms and provides a number of services which can be tailored to meet the needs of care-experienced people. These include:

- **Pre-entry Support**: Applicants with experience of care are eligible for support through Access Aberdeen and Reach. This includes providing tailored support and guidance where possible; for example, with advice on entry pathways and requirements for funding, and accommodation;
- **Admissions**: The University provides a guaranteed offer of admission to care-experienced applicants who meet the minimum entry requirements, or a guaranteed interview for applicable candidates. Applicants with experience of care will be considered under the University's Contextualised Admissions and Access Thresholds Policy;
- **Accommodation**: The University offers year-round accommodation to students who are care experienced. Care-experienced students can also apply for the University's Rental Guarantor Scheme should they wish to rent from a private landlord;
- **Financial assistance**: Care-experienced students are eligible to apply for a range of scholarship opportunities via the University's internal WA scholarship programme;

- **Transition Support**: Access to a bespoke online transition courses developed to help boost confidence when starting at the University;
- **Advice and Support Office**: Like all students, those with care-experience have access to the University's Support and Advice Office, offering impartial and confidential advice and support on a range of issues, including finance, disability support and more.

3.1.3. The University's outline of how it supports the sector's delivery of the COWA targets

The University continues in its efforts to meet the sector-wide recruitment target of 10% for Scottish-domiciled entrants from the 20% most deprived areas in the country. In 2021-22 provisional data indicates that the University matched its performance of 7.9% from the previous year. While this means the University remains short of the overarching SFC target, it is nonetheless considered a positive outcome, taking account of context. In particular, while the proportion of students recruited from these areas has stagnated, the headcount rose year-on-year from 116 in 2020/21, to 151 in 2021/22. And while worth noting that this area was impacted by the pandemic, and an inability to conduct outreach and engagement activities in person, of greater significance, the stagnation in percentage terms reflects changes arising as a consequence of Brexit, with the University significantly increasing its intake of Scottish domiciled students, to offset the drop in EU student numbers. This has put additional pressure on the University's ability to maintain or increase its recruitment under this measure in proportional terms, in particular given the relatively low numbers of eligible students in the local region, when compared to other areas nationwide. On this point, the Commissioner for Widening Access has acknowledged that the current SIMD20 metrics applied across Scotland do not meet the needs of the local Aberdeen City and Shire catchment, and therefore may be subject to review at government level. Notwithstanding these points, the University continues to work with the SFC to best support the widening access agenda, both locally and nationally, by continuing to enhance entry routes into higher education. Already highlighted in this document are numerous policies to support fair access and transitions, which also directly support the delivery of the COWA targets. These include:

- Continued free accommodation to first year students;
- Continued promotion of the Eligibility for Free School Meals alongside SIMD20 as a key widening access measure;
- Contextualised admissions, with applicants meeting widening access criteria guaranteed an adjusted offer;
- Targeted Scholarships;
- Ongoing partnerships and collaborations that work with target learners at schools and colleges through University-funded initiatives.

3.1.4. Prior learning is considered and students are offered the best pathway for them

The University continues to support, promote and enhance opportunities for learners to progress from further education to study at Aberdeen. This is reflected via the most recently available data in key areas like articulation; where 46.7% of those eligible articulated with advanced standing, an 8% increase from 38.4% the prior year. The University's performance in this space is underpinned by Articulate Aberdeen, which recognises a range of types of prior learning (certificated and experiential) through the University's Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy.

In addition, work is ongoing to support all colleges and offer articulation advice to college students across Scotland, with staff are attending as many in-person sessions as possible across the country, prioritising partner institutions. Information is also provided to school pupils regarding access to university via college, working with Access Aberdeen to facilitate this.

To further enhance the articulation provision, the University is also engaged with the SQA on their "Next Generation HN" Project to look at expanding entry routes by mapping new qualifications. Feedback is also being gathered from students who chose not to enter University with advanced standing to help inform strategies and support moving forward.

Additionally, a third year of [Learning & Teaching Enhancement Programme](#) (LTEP) funding has been secured, and this is being utilised to enhance resilience of Advanced Entry (AE) students, building on previous LTEP awards. The intention is to run a workshop for University of Aberdeen staff (academic and professional services) and other individuals involved in supporting AE students across the sector (2) evaluating a toolkit with resources for AE students.

3.1.5. Transitions and pathways for students are supported and signposted

A comprehensive 'Transitions' strategy for students that aims to support and prepare students at different stages of their student journey (e.g. from school into university, from 3rd year into 4th year) and for different needs (e.g. widening participation, students as carers) has been implemented.

The long established S4S "Students for Students" mentoring scheme has now introduced shared experience matching with students being supported by other students coming from similar backgrounds to their own.

Careers Advisers are professionally trained through postgraduate qualifications, to provide high quality careers education, information and guidance to support the careers and employability development of students and graduates and to understand the specific needs of students from widening participation backgrounds. Careers Advisers work with specific schools within the University to provide up to date knowledge of career options and labour market information to students from those schools.

3.1.6. Institutions work with schools, SFC funded programmes and local communities to support successful pathways and effective transitions for students

Demonstrated throughout the Outcome of "Fair Access and Transitions" section of this document, the University works with a variety of programmes and providers both locally and nationally to support successful pathways and effective transitions for students. The Access and Articulation Team works with prospective students on key projects such as Access Aberdeen, Articulate Aberdeen, Reach, and the National Schools Programme, to further develop bridging programmes to enhance access and transition to HE.

3.2 HIGH QUALITY, LEARNING, TEACHING AND SUPPORT

"Students of all levels experience a high-quality, safe and supportive learning experience that enables them to succeed in their studies and they find it easy to participate and engage in their educational experience."

3.2.1. The student experience of learning, teaching and support is protected

The University is strategically focused on caring for the wellbeing, health and safety of its people – staff and students – and on providing development support to help people achieve their full potential. This is illustrated via [Commitment 1](#) in Aberdeen 2040 under its Inclusive theme. The Inclusive theme underpins the University's Education agenda and that of the wider student experience. Examples of initiatives in place include:

- The University has a [Wellbeing Strategy 2021 – 2025](#), which is underpinned by a [Mental Health and Wellbeing](#) policy.
- Online and on campus [Student Support Services](#) responsive to students' needs.
- Administration of SAAS hardship and additional funds raised through our Development Trust.
- Our [Inclusivity and Accessibility in Education Framework](#).
- Our work towards [Decolonising the Curriculum](#).
- Utilising the best of new practices developed in Education during the Covid-19 pandemic, with Inclusion as one of the [Principles for the Delivery of Education AY 22/23](#).
- Implementation of a suite of inclusion policies, notably the overarching Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policy and new policies / drafts regarding neurodiversity and carers.
- Implementation of institutional and School action plans to address continuation and degree awarding gaps.

- The Student Support and Experience Committee remit ensures that issues for our students are identified, solutions developed, and good practice shared.
- Feedback from the University's Inform system, class reps and Staff/Student Liaison Committees, National Student Survey and Aberdeen Student Experience Survey are analysed and inform actions to address areas for improvement.
- An updated Code of Practice on Student Discipline (non-academic) and an online reporting tool for harassment.
- Specific training to enhance the culture, our awareness of and actions to address gender-based violence and race equality.
- A pastoral support system for students at all levels is in place.
- A monitoring, absence and engagement system identifies students 'at risk' leading to support.
- Student peer support is offered including the option to match those with shared experiences.

BeWell and Inclusion Week raises awareness of the importance of wellbeing and inclusion and promotes open debate and conversations regarding future action.

3.2.2. There is rigour and quality in learning and teaching processes

The University's Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) has overall responsibility for Quality Assurance and reports into the University Senate. The Committee discusses and approves any regulatory or policy changes and all decisions are recorded and monitored through the QAC. Section 3.2.3, below, refers to the quality assurance procedures that are in place. The University Education Committee (UEC) has overall responsibility for the strategic development of Education. Each School also has an Education Committee that is responsible for ensuring that institutional policy and procedures are implemented and monitored, ultimately ensuring rigour and quality in the delivery of Education across all areas.

Beyond this, it should also be noted that since returning to on-campus teaching following Covid-19, the University has undertaken an evaluation of blended learning to inform and further develop its approaches to the delivery of Education, in a way that maintains rigour and maximises quality.

3.2.3. Arrangements for quality assurance and enhancement support to the standards expected by students

As described in last year's Outcome Agreement in Section 3.2.3, QA processes are in place to ensure that the quality of education delivered is maintained and enhanced, and that the student experience is optimised, irrespective of where a student is based (i.e., on-campus in Aberdeen, Qatar or online). These policies are mapped to the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) own policies and processes, under their Quality Code. The Code defines a set of standards and expectations for the sector. It should also be noted that the University's policy documents are regularly reviewed to ensure they remain appropriate.

The University is also committed to ensuring the QA of its Transnational Education (TNE) and is a member of the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) TNE Quality Evaluation and Enhancement Scheme thereby investing in the quality of the University's academic and student experience, while demonstrating its commitment to the advancement of UK higher education delivered overseas.

3.2.4. Enhancement and improvement of learning, teaching and support is informed by data and evidence – including the outcomes of quality assurance

As referenced in the 2021/22 Outcome Agreement, in section 3.2.4, the use of data and evidence remains central to University decision-making for learning, teaching and support for students.

Additionally, the University has a monitoring process in place which enables identification of a lack of engagement with learning and triggers a process by which academic and pastoral support is provided proactively. A review of the approach to monitoring student engagement is currently in progress, alongside an ongoing Pastoral Support Review which aims to further enhance the personal tutor role for all students.

3.2.5. Learning and teaching strategies are adapting to include approaches for digital and blended learning

As part of its Covid-19 Education response, the University undertook an evaluation of its blended learning provision, taking account of sector-wide practice. The final report from this is available here. Examples of work in this area include:

- The development of 5 Principles for the Delivery of Education. Approaches and examples are provided to inspire, encourage, and support staff to further enhance their Education delivery.
- Work is ongoing to expand the provision of digitally-enhanced teaching spaces to support hybrid learning where this is the most appropriate approach.
- Development of teaching spaces to support Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) as part of an overall ambition to enhance international learning opportunities for all students.
- A pilot to implement an adapted TESTA (Transforming the experience of students through assessment) in the digital age.
- The development of Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes and Skills over this academic year, to further support a focus on digital developments for students as learners and for their employability.

3.2.6. Staff have the skills and support to deliver a high-quality learning, teaching and support experience for students

Whilst delivering a high quality and supportive student experience is at the core of the University, ensuring staff have the skills and support to fulfil those principles are vital. These are detailed in the 2021/22 Outcome Agreement, section 3.2.6. The University continues efforts to ensure that staff are appropriately developed and supported to deliver high-quality learning, teaching and support for students.

In addition, all academic development opportunities for staff (and PhD students) who teach and support learning will align with the five Principles for the Delivery of Education, beginning with the 4-week online Micro-credential short course: Enhancing your teaching for 2022-23.

3.2.7. Students have good experiences of transitions into and through tertiary level learning

The University continues to deliver and enhance its "Welcome and Orientation" activities (online and on campus) and support for new and returning students at all levels. In addition to the policies highlighted in the 2021/22 Outcome Agreement, additional examples include:

- Key orientation information is shared with students at key moments throughout the year, with students reminded of the support available to them. This covers the University's expectations and the support it offers on academic and pastoral matters.
- For widening access and articulating students transitioning to University for the first time, there is a dedicated event each year, held on campus to assist with integration into life at the University. In 2023, this will be supplemented with a Toolkit for Articulating Students, currently under development; this will be designed as a further support mechanism for those coming from college.
- Extended year-round widening access bridging programmes, referenced in 3.1.1 of this document, which are open to all and will be of particular value to those who may have been away from study over a period, or who have lower levels of familiarity with the University experience.
- The University Student Experience Team works closely with Schools to enhance the School information webpages to help prepare students and to begin to foster a sense of belonging. Schools also deliver transition sessions to assist students in the move to honours-level study (at UG level).
- Continued promotion of new student Facebook groups which support students to engage in dialogue and to begin forming friendships. This includes students based in University Halls of Residence.
- Student Residence Assistants provide on-site support to students in Halls and Student Ambassadors and Student Support colleagues welcome students, focussing on those who arrive on their own;

- The University works closely with AUSA to support students in their academic and personal transition and achievements;
- Work is ongoing continuously with student content creators to develop a suite of content to support transition, providing an insight into University life through the eyes of students from diverse backgrounds, including refugees.

3.2.8. Students are supported in their mental health and wellbeing

Supporting mental health is a key aspect of the University's Wellbeing Strategy and the University has developed the Student Mental Health Agreement in partnership with AUSA. The Agreement has five working areas, which are:

- Raising awareness of support available;
- Ensuring that support services are available and accessible to all;
- Encouraging, promoting, and facilitating student self-care;
- Continued development of staff support, resources, and training;
- Supporting Schools to provide a more consistent approach to study-related support.

To support these, various support mechanisms are in place (in addition to the information provided in the 2021/22 Agreement under section 3.2.8;

- Bespoke training on numerous topics including suicide preventions, GBV, Mental Health interventions and crisis management for our support teams and HR staff.
- Appointment of a new Student Support Adviser (Complex Cases) to provide more focus on complex case management and the support of students in crisis, or with longer term needs together with GBV.
- Creation of a new post of Mental Wellbeing Policy Advisor.
- Further enhancement of the range of support offered by a trained counselling team (including supporting staff who support students), reviewing it in line with trauma informed approaches and specific student needs amongst other areas.
- A structured programme of events is provided by the Wellbeing Team in Student Experience at key pressure points (including BeWell week) and provides online resources, including the Wellbeing Toolkit and the BeWell podcast series.
- Additionally, a list of several support resources can be found on the Your Wellbeing webpages.

3.3. PARTNERSHIP, PARTICIPATION AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE

"Students find it easy to participate, have their voice heard and valued, and influence their educational and student experience"

3.3.1. Effective partnership arrangements between institutional leadership teams and student bodies

The University is focused on ensuring that students are aware of the various ways that they can provide feedback on the educational experience and their wider student experience, considering this key to ensuring effective partnerships are in place between student bodies and institutional leadership. A number of processes are in place to this end; please refer to section 3.3.1 of the 2021/22 Outcome Agreement for further information. Examples of areas where the University continues to work in partnership with students are:

- Students are a core part of the team that is taking forward the Institutional decolonising the curriculum work and they participate in all the associated working groups. In addition, student interns have been appointed to each of the disciplines within the School of Social Science as partners in the School-based work that is ongoing.
- Currently a student is the Institutional theme lead for the current Enhancement Theme and they are embedded within all the decision-making around the work, including in the planning for the annual symposium and in decision-making on funding for projects for the Theme.

- Students are members of the National Student Survey steering committee where they work with the University to identify Institutional themes for the NSS and ensure that the University is appropriately raising the profile of the NSS, to ensure meaningful student feedback is received to analyse and determine actions.

3.3.2. Student partnership is valued across the institution and plays a key role in enhancing the student experience

The University and the Aberdeen University Student Association (AUSA) have a Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) in place, based on a set of core themes. The SPA is designed to support both AUSA and UOA strategies and organisational objectives, continuity and also annual updates in line with Sabbatical priorities. Since the inception of the SPA, the University, AUSA and the wider student body have benefitted from increased collaboration and coordination of projects to support the student experience; for example, this has included the Student Mental Health Agreement (2021). The University and AUSA have established a joint working group to review the SPA in light of a range of institutional working groups that focus on the key issues within the existing SPA. The group will be undertaking a staff and student consultation, in addition to benchmarking research, with a view to potentially adjusting the existing model to create maximum impact.

3.4 LEARNING WITH IMPACT

"Students at all levels are equipped to flourish in employment, further study and to lead fulfilling lives."

3.4.1. Students are supported to successfully complete their courses

The actions listed in this area in the 2021/22 Outcome Agreement under section 3.4.1 broadly remain in place and have been adjusted as the external context has changed. Examples include:

- The University's "Principles for the Delivery of Education" (see 3.2.1) that built on the "Principles for Blended Learning";
- Training and support for staff to deliver high quality education and support students' success.
- Communication approaches that aim to provide relevant information and support in a timely way, so students have the information they need;
- A focus on the enhancement of assessment and feedback; for example, authentic assessment or assessment integrity;
- Ongoing development of facilities to support active learning in the classroom;
- A focus on the cost-of-living crisis, with several approaches in place to support all students, and to target students who have particular needs, including a dedicated Cost Of Living webpage containing tips, advice and information alongside direction to advice services.
- The offer of free "Brainy Breakfasts" twice a week to students set them up for the day.
- A review of campus locations to ensure that there are warm spaces available 24 hours per day and throughout the year (including the winter closure period).

And as referenced in the introduction to this document, the University now ranks 4th out of 124 HEIs across the UK in the NSS, one place higher than in 2021; indicating that the support it provides students, as part of the wider student experience, has been of the highest quality.

3.4.2. Students are supported to progress to positive next destinations

The University continues to be proactive in ensuring the actions listed in section 3.4.2 of the 2021/22 Outcome Agreement continue to support students to progress to positive next destinations.

3.4.3. Institutions implement appropriate support arrangements for graduating cohorts who will experience a challenging labour market in coming months/years

Given the challenging labour-market, the University remains committed to ensuring there are appropriate support arrangements in place for graduating cohorts. The actions listed at section 3.4.3 of the 2021/22 Outcome Agreement remain relevant, with some updated examples given below:

- The ABDN Grad Challenge programme, launched in 2021, giving graduating students the opportunity to work in teams in a virtual professional environment to solve employer-led challenges. It gives them an opportunity to develop professional skills and prepare for workplace settings.
- The ABDNConnect Experience Programme has replaced the previous ABDNCommunity Volunteering Programme and ABDNConnect Internships to provide a single point for students to reflect on their skills development while undertaking an activity such as part-time or paid internships, or volunteering.
- The University is also part of Graduate Career Advantage Scotland (GCAS) – this initiative won an Excellence Award from the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) for Supporting Student and Graduate Employability Award in 2022 – which offers dedicated resource to ensure opportunities and graduates in the north region are supported.

3.4.4. Institutions ensure their curriculum and pedagogical offer remains fit for purpose and is responsive to changed need and demand

The University ensures that its curriculum and pedagogical offer remains fit for purpose, and that it evolves to changing demands and expectations. This is done via a number of groups, including a Programme Advisory Board, an Employer Liaison Committee, and an overarching Institutional Employer Board. Different Schools have taken different approaches based upon their requirements. These groups are subgroups of the overall Institutional Employer Board and are available online. These groups are regularly reviewed to ensure maximum effectiveness within and external to the University.

One example of how these Boards have enhanced, and informed curriculum is within the Business School. The School established an advisory board to inform the strategic direction of the School supporting both research and teaching. Subgroups covering employability, entrepreneurship, internationalisation, and energy transition have been established to inform aspects of the School such as programme or degree structures. There is an institutional focus on enhancing graduate outcomes for students with a number of University-level workstreams in place. Their collective focus includes further developing placement and work-based learning provision; the development of a Skills Recognition Framework; and the further development of partnerships with regional employers.

3.4.5. There is a good understanding of the needs of business and industry; and Scotland's economic needs

The University continues to be involved in a wide range of regional groups that provide insights into business and industry needs; these include the Northeast Regional Economic Strategy Group, the Opportunity Northeast (ONE) Board, and the Northeast Committee of the Scottish Council for Development & Industry. These groups also provide a platform to extend the reach of the University regionally and nationally to influence both policy matters and economic growth. Given the particular importance of energy transition to the economic future of the region the University is working closely with partners as part of the National Energy Skills Accelerator to understand employers' future workforce skills requirements.

3.4.6. There is a pipeline of appropriately skilled people for the labour market

Employer opportunities continue to grow each year. The Careers and Employability Service advertised 7,605 opportunities in 2021-22, comprising 5,343 graduate jobs/internships, 1,807 work placements and internships and 455 other types, including part-time work. It is also notable that the number of employer opportunities is growing with the figures for 2021-22 set against 4,337 in 2019-20 and 5,687 in 2020-21. Furthermore, around 200 events were advertised in 2021-22, and over 2,000 places booked by students; noting some events do not require bookings so the actual number will be higher.

As highlighted above (see 3.4.4), the University has embarked on a workstream of activity to develop a Skills Recognition Framework that will allow students to demonstrate and reflect upon the skills they have acquired throughout their programme of study alongside their co-curricular and extra-curricular activity. This will allow enhanced flexibility for students to create their own skills pathway to match their career aspirations at the same time as being supported by the University Careers Office. Furthermore, the Skills Recognition Framework will allow students to highlight their skills to employers both during and after their studies.

3.5 EQUALITIES AND INCLUSION

"Every student has their individual needs recognised in terms of protected characteristics; and everyone is treated fairly and with respect"

The University has an overarching Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy which is enacted through a range of policies and processes. A particular focus in 2021/22 has been on race equality, with the approval of the University's Antiracism Strategy in June 2022. The Strategy will be taken forward through an extensive action plan (building on existing action plans for race equality) and progress is being made across a range of areas.

The University has recently refreshed its Equality Impact Assessment template to incorporate a broader set of inclusion areas. This supports policy owners to think about the impact of their policy on students and to incorporate mitigating actions where appropriate. An example of the effectiveness of this approach was during the Covid pandemic, where regular equality impact assessments were carried out on the blended learning approach to ensure that students had appropriate access to their learning. These assessments were undertaken in consultation with the staff and student equality networks, incorporating the learning from lived experience, and reviewed by the EDI Committee.

4. OUTCOMES FOR RESEARCH

4.1 RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

4.1.1 Institutions produce excellent research outputs

The University's research quality and capacity, and the way in which it supports excellence are under ongoing review as part of institutional strategic planning arrangements. Research and interdisciplinarity are a particular focus of Aberdeen 2040 implementation, now informed by lessons learnt from the REF2021 exercise. In previous Outcome Agreements, the need to increase research capacity and how the University planned to invest in additional researchers was covered; investment in research capacity and work on improving research support and research culture were ongoing before the REF2021 submission. However, the results of REF2021 and the associated funding outcome both amplified the need for investment, whilst at the same time, presented a challenge in terms of the available resource to support the improvements the University is planning for. To this end, the University plans to supplement Research Excellence Grant (REG) funding with institutional funds to enable the programme of measures set out below.

- Leadership for the five interdisciplinary challenges, including appointment of 20 interdisciplinary research fellows to support the interdisciplinary challenges;
- Continued growth of researcher numbers to strengthen Interdisciplinary Research (IDR) themes in selected strategic areas;
- To increase the number of REF eligible staff, which has already grown by 4.5% since census date;
- Continued pump prime funding focusing on high quality research, interdisciplinary research, international partnerships, engagement and impact;
- Enhanced support for development of large bids for external research grant funding;
- Enhanced conference funds for academic staff to present and shape emerging innovative research.

4.1.2 The research impact reaches beyond academia

Demonstrating the University's excellent research outputs, and contributions to impact reaching beyond academia are **two case studies** attached as **Appendices 4 and 5**. These case studies provide examples of the importance of the Research Excellence Grant to underpin the dual funding system for research, ensuring the long-term support required to demonstrate impact and noting it takes time to secure 4* outputs with further time to demonstrate the full impact of research. These are only a few examples of the University's far reaching excellent research outputs. A further six case studies will be submitted to the SFC by March 2023.

The two studies submitted with this document are:

- "Soil science excellence leading to global impact"
- "Affordable school uniforms: safeguarding Scottish Children's rights to education"

In addition to the case studies attached in Appendices 4 and 5 the University continues to deliver research outputs which have long-term impact reach. To support this in a sustainable way, the following priority actions are underway:

- Enhanced focus on engagement with stakeholders and co-creation of research in response to societal challenges;
- Supporting regional collaboration – for example with NHS Grampian and Aberdeen City Council towards capacity building in public health and research capabilities within the local authority;
- Supporting industrial diversification, through our engagement and contribution towards development of the next Regional Economic Strategy, including projects relating to Regional Energy Transition;
- Enhanced training for academic staff to deliver impactful research;
- Review and enhance support structures for increased stakeholder engagement, translational research and delivery of impact.

4.1.3 The research environment supports excellence and impact

Ensuring the University has a positive research culture is key to an environment that supports excellence and impact. Following REF 2021, the implementation of a major review of research culture and the wider research environment was undertaken by a Research Culture Task and Finish Group. The Research Culture Task and Finish Group was set up early with a wide-ranging brief to identify policies and procedures in place that benefit the University's research culture, and to identify gaps and to make recommendations on how these can be addressed. Following postponement of its work in 2020 due to Covid, the group consulted widely among academic and professional services colleagues and produced several recommendations around the development of research careers and improving the experience of those working in research. All recommendations made were designed to support an inclusive, respectful and enabling environment. It reported in Autumn 2021 and the University is working on implementing proposals made, in tandem with work on meeting its commitments under the Concordat to Support Career Development of Researchers.

4.2 RESEARCH SUSTAINABILITY

"Institutions ensure that their world class research programmes are on a sustainable footing, particularly amidst the uncertainty surrounding the UK's future relationship with Horizon Europe."

4.2.1 The research environment support excellence and impact

To enable ongoing research sustainability, the University acknowledges how crucial it is to maintain an environment that supports excellence and impact. In addition to section 4.1.3, to specifically maintain sustainability the University undertakes the following:

- Training and staff development with a particular focus on research excellence and impact, open access, research integrity and ethics, implementation of Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA);

- Implementation of the outcomes of a REF lessons learnt exercise and plan to strengthen existing support and develop additional support to significantly improve the quality of research;
- Review and strengthen academic mentoring at all career stages;
- Review and strengthen research leave. This already enables researchers to take research leave to support a wide range of activities, including engagement and impact. The University will offer a funded institutional research leave scheme;
- Introduction of a funded visiting scholar scheme to enhance networking and collaboration, supporting excellence in research and impact;
- Additional support for conference and stakeholder meeting attendance, again supporting networking and collaboration;
- All awards under the proposed research leave and visiting scholar schemes will be competitive, and outcomes monitored carefully;
- International collaborations – enhanced collaborations with Curtin and Calgary Universities and fostering new relationships with Augusta University, Georgia, USA;
- Continued collaboration with our NHS partners – regional and national;
- Continued collaboration with our regional industrial partners, particularly around Energy Transition, Food, Drink and Agriculture (SeedPod), LifeSciences (launch of the BioHub) and Digital Technology and entrepreneurships (working with Techscaler).

4.2.2 Institutions implement the Research Integrity and Researcher Development concordats

Evidence of implementation of the Research Integrity and Researcher Development concordats include:

- Implementation of recommendations of Research Culture Task and Finish Group which includes implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, encouraging excellent research and impact as well as rewarding collegiality and behaviours the support integrity and inclusion;
- Postgraduate Task and Finish Group to deliver recommendations and plan for their implementation to support PGR Growth and future employability;
- Ongoing work to support the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, Concordat on Open Research, Concordat on Openness in Animal Research, Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research, the Concordat on Knowledge Exchange and San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA);
- Support for research integrity and ethics – introduction of a new on-line platform for processing non-clinical applications for ethical approval, development of an institutional framework that enhances consistency and transparency across the six participating ethics boards;
- Support for open access – introducing a new Rights Retention Policy which will be implemented early next year;
- Re-launch of Aberdeen University Press as an open access publisher.

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

Underpinning the future of research, the University sees support for PhD students as pivotal to enabling research sustainability and long-term growth. Overseen by the Graduate School, there is an ongoing implementation of recommendations from the Postgraduate Task and Finish Group to deliver the innovative acquisition of employability skills, relevant to and applicable across employment sectors, particularly in light of the instability created by the pandemic and current economic climate. These include:

- Launch of the new interdisciplinary PhD programme aligned to the IDR priorities;
- Continue to review and support (case by case) PhD projects which have been significantly and insurmountably impacted by Covid-19;
- Development of Guiding Principles for inclusive PGR recruitment that recognises non-traditional routes into PhD study;
- Recruitment of a cohort of challenge based interdisciplinary PhD students embedded within the Interdisciplinary Research Centres and underpinned by a development programme to ensure

students to emerge from the PhD with significant skills in engaging with researchers beyond their discipline.

5. OUTCOMES FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND SOCIAL RENEWAL

5.1. RESPONSIVE INSTITUTIONS

"Institutions are responsive to employer and industry needs and to current and future skills requirements"

5.1.1. Institutions make use of labour market intelligence and employer / industry engagement to align provision

The University builds and uses labour market intelligence at multiple levels, utilising nationally available data insights via Skills Development Scotland, alongside insights captured via sources such as our discipline-specific Programme Advisory Boards (or equivalents) that inform curriculum provision. Further details are available in the 2021/22 Outcome Agreement, section 5.1.1 where the measures outlined there remain in place or ongoing.

5.1.2. Institutions play their part in upskilling and reskilling the existing workforce

The University successfully disbursed its allocations from the SFC Upskilling, National Transition Training Fund (NTTF) and North-East Economic Recovery and Skills funds in academic year 2021-22. In total, £1.1million was spent, largely on fee waivers. This equated to 1,117 funded places in total over the three funds. Two case studies demonstrating the use of the SFC Upskilling and NTTF are available for review.

With the discontinuation of the NTTF and NEERSF, the University is well underway with its activity to disburse the £620K it has received as part of the 2022-23 SFC Upskilling Fund. 240 funded places have already been allocated to 27 online short courses commencing in September 2022. A further 250 funded places will be allocated on January 2023 short courses in leadership, management, health and wellbeing, energy transition, digital and data skills and entrepreneurship. These funding opportunities are promoted via social media campaigns, outdoor adverts, business and industry contacts, the University's Civic News ezine and through networks such as Public Affairs, Stakeholder Engagement and Events (PACE) and the Upskilling Leads Network.

A suite of short online courses on Diet and Lifestyle Health were introduced on the FutureLearn platform and can be studied for free. The Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): Health, Law, and Socio-Cultural Sensitivity course launched on 7 February 2022 to coincide with international day of zero tolerance for female genital mutilation and finished on International Women's Day. The MOOC on Mindfulness for Teachers is in development and is scheduled to launch in November 2022.

There are now 133 online short courses in the On-demand Learning site providing growing choice and flexibility for upskillers and reskillers. A 10-credit course in Data Visualisation with Python was introduced to meet the need for shorter, 'bite sized' offerings.

The short course route to programme study proved popular in 2021-22. This route allowed 94 students without typical academic entry requirements to take two short courses to demonstrate their capability of attaining at Master's level. After successfully completing 30 credits, these students were transferred to a Master's programme. We expect to see more students avail of this study route in 2022-23 as we see more eligible short course students and more programmes admitting students in this way.

The University also continues to develop professional development courses and programmes in response to industry skills requirements; for example, the MSc in Energy Transition Systems and Technologies.

5.1.3. People have the necessary meta skills and attributes to succeed

The University ensures that students have the necessary meta skills and attributes to be successful via a number of means, which are listed in the 2021/22 Outcome Agreement and remain valid; see sections

5.1.3. Of particular note, the University is continuing to develop a Skills Recognition Framework that will incorporate various levels of skills development including meta skills. The framework will allow students to collate and reflect upon the skills they have from their programme of study as well as their co-curricular and extra-curricular activities to provide them with a set of skills and qualities that they can use to succeed in their studies and following graduation.

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

In addition to the examples detailed in section 5.1.4 of the 2021/22 Outcome Agreement The DFN Project SEARCH University of Aberdeen site launched in September 2013 and is hosted by the University on its King's College campus. The site offers a one-year Internship programme to up to 12 young people aged 16-24 every year who are supported to undertake three work placements within the University and our partner organisations (covering a range of roles including administration, grounds maintenance, IT/media services, childcare, catering and retail experience) whilst studying towards the City & Guilds Certificate in Employability Skills.

The programme operates on a partnership basis involving several organisations, including Values Into Action Scotland (VIAS) (which holds the licence to operate the programme) and North East Scotland College (where Interns are registered students). Interns also receive support during and after their Project SEARCH year from other partner organisations, including colleagues from Skills Development Scotland, the Department for Work & Pensions and the Aberdeenshire Council Employability team.

Since the launch in September 2013, an average of 68% of our graduates have moved into employment in a variety of organisations across the North-East of Scotland – nearly 10 times above the average employment rate for those with a learning disability who do not enter any type of post-school programme.

In October 2022, the programme received national recognition in being awarded two DFN Project SEARCH Outcomes Awards in recognition of its employment rates for Session 2020/21 being in the top 10% of all the 120 DFN Project SEARCH sites across the UK, Ireland and Iberia.

5.1.5. Fair Work – Institutions advance and promote Fair Work practices as employers

In line with the Inclusive theme in Aberdeen 2040, and the five commitments made, the advancement of fair work practices is a key tenet of University strategy in this area. The University is committed to adopting the Scottish Government's "Fair Work First" policy, with the following areas targeted:

- Ensuring appropriate channels for employees to have a voice;
- Investment in workforce development;
- No inappropriate use of zero hours contracts;
- Actions to tackle the gender pay gap and create diverse and inclusive workplaces;
- Payment of the real Living Wage.

The University has already made changes to working practices to meet these areas including being an accredited Living Wage Employer since 2015. Further actions to support the above key areas include:

- **Ongoing and long-established partnership working with all recognised Campus Trade Unions** – Campus Trade Unions form part of formal University Committees and Working Groups, Trade Union representative meet with Senior Management and HR regularly to ensure that staff opinions and views are heard. Regular open meetings are also held with members of the Senior Management Team where all staff are encouraged to voice their opinions and ask questions.
- **Comprehensive suite of management and skills training** – Training is available to all staff and is reviewed regularly to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the workforce and the University, demonstrating the University's recognition of the importance in investing in Staff Development.
- **Zero hours contracts** - The University does not use zero hours contracts and the Reward Consultation and Negotiation Group has recently completed a review of the use of Guaranteed Minimum Hours contracts. This review has brought about changes including increasing the

minimum default number of hours offered as well ensuring that where members of staff have worked a consistent level of hours they are offered a fractional contract.

In addition to the above, the University's Public Sector Equality Duty Report 2021 should be noted.

5.2. CONFIDENT AND HIGHLY CAPABLE - WORK-READY – GRADUATES

"Work-ready graduates are confident and ready to secure success in their career, meeting employer needs and making a positive contribution to our economy and society: Students are equipped to take up employment and succeed when the job market opens up."

5.2.1. There is a pipeline of technically skilled people for key industries where skills gaps identified

The University seeks to maintain a pipeline of technically skilled people where gaps are identified in key industries, via a variety of means. These are documented under 3.4.5 and listed in the 2021/2022 Outcome Agreement, section 5.2.1.

Additionally, the University works closely with regional partners such as Opportunity North-East (ONE), Energy Transition Zone Ltd. and the Scottish Universities Life Science Alliance (SULSA). These partnerships are focused on the needs of specific sectors, including energy, digital and life sciences, with emerging initiatives that include Life Sciences Masterclasses that once run, are then available to download and are open to all.

5.2.2. Programmes should equip graduates with the skills, knowledge and capabilities to be successful in their chosen career

In addition to the information in the section 5.2.2 of the 2021/22 Outcome Agreement, to equip graduate with the skills, knowledge and capabilities to be successful in their chosen career, "Career Readiness" has been piloted at the start of AY 2022-23 and will be fully implemented for programmes starting in January. Career Readiness focuses on a series of questions that enable students to rate their career readiness at the start of every year. These questions will be embedded into the registration process, meaning all students will complete the survey, thereby enabling a data-informed approach to career support provision across disciplines and schools.

5.2.3. Effective support should be in place to enable students to understand their careers options, to self-assess and to undertake career planning

The University ensures that effective support mechanisms are is in place to enable students to understand their career options, to self-assess and to plan accordingly via a range of services and initiatives. These are included in the 2021/22 Outcome Agreement, section 5.2.3.

In addition, the Career Readiness data mentioned above will be used to assess career confidence in students across the institution and will allow for targeted personalised communications throughout the year based on student responses.

Engagement data with the Careers and Employability Service for 2021-22 provides a structured breakdown of engagement of different academic disciplines and a University-wide understanding of the impact the service has among the student population:

- 2,775 booked appointments or interactions;
- 1,962 co-curricular activities recognised on Enhanced Transcript;
- 733 students took part in co-curricular activities led by the Service;
- 287 students completed the Employability Boost Award programme;
- 88% of 1st year undergraduates completed the PD1002* (Getting started at the University of Aberdeen) course;
- 93% of postgraduate taught students complete a course titled "Getting Started at the University of Aberdeen, which is equivalent to a similar course for undergraduates

In addition, students have access to a range of credit bearing employability-related courses from a range of disciplines and the University continues to operate the Aberdeen Intern Plus Programme, offering term-time and part-time internships, and full-time summer internships to current students.

5.2.4. Wherever relevant or beneficial, students should have opportunities to engage in work-informed or work-based learning

Students at Aberdeen are regularly given opportunities to engage in work-informed or work-based learning, with a concerted focus in recent years to increase the number of opportunities available to students across all disciplines. This will continue over the coming years. Many continuing examples are found in the 2021/22 Outcome Agreement, section 5.2.4.

The University is undertaking a strategic workstream to further develop the models and opportunities for work-based learning and opportunities for placements as part of the Aberdeen 2040 Strategy. This wide-ranging review aims to enhance provision for students by allowing them to have multiple pathways to engage with organisations within their programme of study.

Additionally, the University has now successfully run the ABDN Grad Challenge programme twice following its launch in 2021. This programme gives graduating students the opportunity to work in teams in a virtual professional environment to solve employer-led challenges. The University works with partner organisations within the region to give students the opportunity to develop professional skills and prepare for workplace settings in interdisciplinary and multi-year teams.

The University is also a Partner with Entrepreneurial Scotland for their Saltire Internships Programme and is a Partner with Bright Network connecting students with a short sector focused experience programme via their virtual platform.

5.3   KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND INNOVATION

5.3.1   HEIs are focusing and prioritising their knowledge exchange and innovation activity on the top priorities of a green recovery, a well-being economy and a just transition to a net zero carbon society.

The five interdisciplinary challenges identified within Aberdeen 2040, provide a focus for knowledge exchange and innovation activity aligned to a green recovery, a well-being economy and a just transition to a net zero carbon society. The themes are Energy Transition, Environment and Biodiversity, Social Inclusion and Cultural Diversity, Health, Well-being and Nutrition, and Data and Artificial Intelligence.

The University's priorities for the coming year include:

- Expansion of the pump-priming fund, promoting collaboration with stakeholders and partners.
- In collaboration with the Net Zero Technology Centre, continue the growth and impact of the industrial engagement strategy of the National Decommissioning Centre, deploying projects and resources aimed at decarbonisation of decommissioning, supporting renewable energy developments and deployment of the simulation suite and tools to accelerate design making for renewable energy.
- Expansion of professional services support for business development and innovation to provide a sectoral focus for innovation activity aligned with the priorities of the region.
- Maintain and expand a programme of Entrepreneurs-in-Residence aimed at health and wellbeing, energy transition and data science.
- Work with partners including Scottish Enterprise, Opportunity North-East and the newly appointed TechScaler to enhance entrepreneurship activity in support of the entrepreneurial campus agenda.
- Continue to grow the number and value of new company partnerships, securing funds from schemes aimed at supportive academics.

Further information on knowledge exchange at the University is available via the University Innovation Fund update, attached as Appendix 3.

5.3.2 Institutions are evolving their strategies for knowledge exchange and innovation and working with key stakeholders, for example enterprise agencies to progress the priorities of a green recovery, a well-being economy and transition to a net zero carbon society

Embedded within Aberdeen 2040, there are commitments to grow and deepen the University's relationships with key stakeholders. Relationships with a number of key regional stakeholders have been enhanced during 2021/22, evidenced through the University's collaborative approach and engagement in the refresh of the Regional Economic Strategy, fulfilling a leading role in the development of the North East Scotland Green Freeport innovation strategy, the partnership in the National Energy Skills Accelerator (NESA) and supporting Aberdeen City Council to secure £5m to establish a Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) in partnership with NHS Grampian and RGU, funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). The latter is the only award to be made in Scotland, enabling local authorities to become more research-active and will focus on determining what can be done to address the wider drivers of population health and health inequalities of groups and areas across the city of Aberdeen.

Additionally, the University continues to work with both local councils in their Just Transition programmes (Aberdeen City Net Zero Delivery Unit and Aberdeenshire Council Climate Ready Aberdeen).

Work has also commenced with Scottish Enterprise in developing a strategy to enhance the infrastructure for knowledge exchange and innovation, complementing the partnerships already in place with Opportunity North-East for the launch of BioHub and SeedPod and the Energy Transition Zone programmes around innovation and skills.

Priorities for 2022-23 include:

- Enhancing the partnership with Scottish Enterprise and other partners (including the Connected Places Catapult) to develop a place-based framework for Entrepreneurship and Innovation.
- Reviewing policies around business engagement, consultancy and exploitation of IP via our newly formed Court Commercialisation Committee and University Enterprise & Innovation Committee to ensure adoption of best practice.
- Working with NESA partners to deliver the Scottish Government Just Transition Fund programme on Skills for Energy Transition.

5.4 COLLABORATION

"There is active collaboration with other SFC funded institutions and across the education and skills system."

5.4.1. Institutions consider and pursue meaningful opportunities for collaboration which fit with their mission and vision and supports the delivery of coherent, sustainable provision and research

Through the ongoing work of the North-East Tertiary Pathfinder, the University is working with key regional stakeholders including RGU, NESCol, Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire local authorities, Opportunity North-East and Skills Development Scotland.

Collaborative priorities for the year ahead include:

- Delivery of a series of Pathfinder Pilot Projects including the National Energy Skills Accelerator (NESA) Energy Transition Skills Interactive Pathway, a project to identify qualifications required for different roles in the energy industry, identify gaps in provision, and to develop an interactive pathway to help learners understand the pathways through education providers in the region. Other Pathfinder pilots will focus on planning and provision of health and social care simulation needs across the region, and creation of a strategic working group to maximise opportunities for the enhancement of the senior phase;
- Commitment to supporting those pooling initiatives where the institution has retained membership (SULSA, MASTS, ScotChem, EastBio);

- Continue to support the Scottish Graduate Schools for Social Science and Arts and Humanities to maximise the collaborative opportunities afforded by the critical mass within the Graduate Schools;
- Various partnerships focusing on marine and fisheries research with the Universities of St Andrews and Stirling, and involving the Sea Mammal Research Unit and Marine Scotland Science;
- Partnership with Environmental Research Institute (ERI) at the University of the Highlands and Islands, funded by Ørsted, the global leader in offshore wind;
- Partnerships with MRPs for the delivery of Scottish Governments RESAS programme of R&D.

5.4.2. Institutions consider collaboration on estates assets that could: improve local coherence and sustainability of provision; reduce carbon emissions and be a part of place-based approach to economic recovery

Strongly linked to the Aberdeen 2040 Sustainable theme, the University continues to actively seek collaboration around estates assets to support this expectation. Examples include:

- The University will continue to engage fully in civic discussion around the development of a city-wide heat network. This will include working bilaterally with Aberdeen Heat & Power (AHP) on projects to link University assets with the AHP network, while simultaneously contributing to the multi-stakeholder dialogue about developing a genuinely city-wide heating network.
- The University will explore the possibility of long-term partnership approaches with private sector entities to support the development and delivery of the net-zero strategy. These will, in the first instance, be linked to development of a Sustainable Heating Strategy, an integral component of a wider approach to net-zero.
- Existing electric vehicle (EV) charging network will be developed and expanded to enable and accelerate the transition to low emission and electric cars. By making use of technology, the University aims to make the network available to the University community and fleet users during operating hours, expanding that to serve the local community when the University is closed.
- An interest has been expressed in the City Bike scheme being investigated by Aberdeen City Council and the University remains keen to host bikes and related infrastructure on the University campuses, facilitating the uptake of the scheme by University staff and students, as well as by local residents.
- 2023 will see the opening of the new BioHub facility to provide physical infrastructure to grow businesses, nurture new commercialisation opportunities and connect academics and health researchers to industry; it will be the nucleus of the life sciences cluster in the North-East of Scotland.

5.5. CLIMATE EMERGENCY

"Institutions take urgent action to help reduce or halt climate change, avoid irreversible damage, and support environmental sustainability measures."

5.5.1. Universities demonstrate innovative approaches in their response to the climate emergency, showing transformative leadership and the empowerment of the sector communities, building capacity in institutional structures across the sectors, developing a placed-based approach to the climate emergency.

Sustainable is a key strand of Aberdeen 2040 with the actions listed below aligned to supporting this theme.

The University plans to adopt a 'Climate & Sustainability Assembly' model for engaging the community in the discussion of sustainability issues. These assemblies will help to gauge the views of staff and student community on a series of sustainability issues, with the outcomes from those assemblies collated and used to inform decision-making.

Additionally the University will introduce and monitor the implementation of policy recommendations made in 2022 by the Sustainable Business Travel Working Group.

Currently, the University is investigating options for the introduction of sustainability training for staff across the institution. The aim during 2023 is to introduce the first of a range of training opportunities to

allow our staff to engage with climate and sustainability literacy training at a level that supports their needs, further aligned with Aberdeen 2040.

Additionally, during 2022/23, the University will bring forward for approval and publication a Net-Zero Strategy that will provide further detail on targets, implementation plans, and indicative projects. This will expand on the headline net-zero commitment.

As part of the University's continued response to net-zero, the University will embark on the first of a long-term register of necessary campus improvement projects to support the net-zero journey. The projects identified as part of the Net-Zero Project Register will include interventions designed to improve the thermal and energy efficiency of our campus as well as contributing to regional responses to the climate emergency, e.g. heat network developments.

Progress will be made in identifying the full range of Scope 3 emissions, developing mechanisms to help track and report on aspects of emissions the University has not previously been in a position to monitor, e.g. quantifying the emissions impact of students travelling to study with us, and staff & student commuting.

Finally, the University will investigate opportunities to provide more granular data on Scope 3 Procurement emissions to buyers across the University. This is a sector-wide challenge and, where possible, this will be tackled in collaboration with others, e.g. the use of data tools to analyse procurement spend in ways that give us meaningful emissions feedback to act upon. (Aberdeen 2040:19)

5.5.2. **Universities outline how they are engaging with the Sustainable Development Goals.**

The University will assess the outcomes of the 2023 edition of the Times Higher Education 'Impact' Ranking (due in early 2023) and develop an action-plan to identify policy gaps and address areas of weaker performance. The University will continue to utilise the Impact Ranking as a self-improvement tool, deepening our engagement with the SDGs and continuing to demonstrate activity across all 17 SDGs.

Work will continue to showcase work on the SDGs through the annual publication of a stand-alone SDG Report (first published in 2021). The report will detail the breadth and depth of research, teaching, and operational activities that make a positive contribution to the SDGs.

Work to investigate how best to incorporate the SDGs into teaching practices, building upon those courses and programmes where sustainability issues already feature, considering how best to embed sustainability and the SDGs more widely in the curriculum. The University will investigate opportunities to embed sustainability as graduate attribute and how best to recognise this.

SDGs will continue to be embedded in routine activity, e.g. continued mapping of research and related engagement activities against the SDGs, using the SDGs in communication of institutional activity, and working with Academic Schools and Professional Services Directorates to identify where and how to embed the SDGs in local plans.

University Outcome Agreement Impact Framework: Supporting Data

Measure		Actual				Provisional	Projected
		2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
A	Number of Scottish-domiciled Undergraduate Entrants	1,307	1,474	1,551	1,571	2,023	1877
B	Total number of Scottish-domiciled HN entrants from Scottish colleges to undergraduate programmes	211	212	185	137	tbc	tbc
	Number of Scottish-domiciled HN entrants from Scottish colleges to undergraduate programmes with Advanced Standing	37	51	71	64	tbc	tbc
	Proportion of Scottish-domiciled HN entrants from Scottish colleges to undergraduate programmes with Advanced Standing	17.5%	24.1%	38.4%	46.7%	tbc	45.0%
C	COWA measure: Number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree entrants from the 20% most deprived postcodes	72	60	124	116	151	126
	COWA measure: Proportion of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree entrants from the 20% most deprived postcodes	6.0%	4.4%	8.6%	7.9%	7.9%	7.9%
D	Number of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants with care experience	11	26	20	21	19	20
	Proportion of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants with care experience	0.8%	1.8%	1.3%	1.3%	0.9%	1.1%
E	Total number of full-time first year SDUE	1,549	1,190	1,410	1,460	tbc	tbc
	Number of full-time first year SDUE retained	1,473	1,138	1,326	1,423	tbc	tbc
	Proportion of full-time first year SDUE retained	95.1%	95.6%	94.0%	97.5%	96.0%	96.0%
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	1.91	2.79	7.51	5.54	4.0
G1	The number of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey	687	726	832	tbc	tbc	tbc
	The proportion of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey in a positive destination	656	680	799	tbc	tbc	tbc
	The number of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey in a positive destination	95.5%	93.7%	96.0%	96.0%	tbc	tbc
G2	The number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey in employment	506	536	628	tbc	tbc	tbc
	The number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey employed at 'Professional' level or above	355	376	431	tbc	tbc	tbc
	The proportion of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey employed at 'Professional' level or above	70.2%	70.1%	68.6%	70.0%	tbc	tbc
H	Number of Scottish-domiciled Undergraduate Qualifiers	1309	1329	1524	1234	1,229	tbc

* The actual data for 2017-18 to 2020-21 is provided by the SFC via HESA.

* The actual data for 2021-22 is internal data generated by the University where it is available (aside from NSS data which) and is currently classed as provisional. This means the figures here are subject to possible change.

* While acknowledging and striving to meet the 10% target set for the sector for CoWA, the 7.9% target set by the University relfects the particular challenges it faces in this area; given its location innorth-east Scotland, and with its Scottish student population growing as a result of Brexit.

* The cells with data highlighted red (H18 and H21) give internal targets for the next set of Graduate Outcomes results.

*Please note that 2018-19 and 2019-20 figures for measure G2, 2019-20 figures for measures F and H and all 2020-21 figures are impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and may not be directly comparable to other years.

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

2022-23 OUTCOME AGREEMENT

OUTCOME AND IMPACT FRAMEWORK 2021-22 - SELF-EVALUATION

1. INTRODUCTION

The University of Aberdeen's Outcome Agreement (OA) for 2021-22 set out the University's commitments to fair access and transitions, how it would deliver quality learning, teaching and participation opportunities for students, as well as learning with impact. It also sets out how it would continue to deliver both sustainable and high-quality research, whilst at the same time continuing to encourage innovation.

The OA described how the University continued to deal with the public health emergency (Covid-19 crisis) and how the University was contributing, locally and nationally, to ongoing economic recovery and social renewal. The OA also described the University's work relating to the climate emergency. The self-evaluation report for 2021/22 is broken down into the following sections:

*   **Section 1:** Introduction
*   **Section 2:** A reflection on the statistical performance data for AY 2021-22
*   **Section 3:** Reporting on the qualitative and quantitative progress – Milestones and Commitments
*   **Section 4:** Reflections on how the University learning and teaching strategics are adapting to the opportunities and challenges of digital and blended learning
*   **Section 5:** Reporting on early mitigations to address challenges moving into AY 2022-23
*   **Section 6:** Reporting on utilisation and impact of additional in-year funding from the SFC.

Appendix 1 provides a copy of the National Table of Measures provided by the SFC, with 2021-22 data provided by the University using internal data where it is available. This data is still projected and may be subject to change.

It should be further noted that any data for AY 2022-23 referred to in this report relating to the student population will also be subject to change; it is based on internal preview data following the September 2022 student intake.

2. A REFLECTION ON THE STATISTICAL PERFORMANCE DATA FOR ACADEMIC YEAR **2021-22**

2.1 NUMBER OF SCOTTISH-DOMICILED UNDERGRADUATE ENTRANTS

In 2021-22 the University's internal data shows that it welcomed **2023** Scottish Domiciled Undergraduate Entrants (SDUE). This represents a **28.7%** increase in comparison to 2020-21 when the figure was **1571** SDUEs.

2.2 NUMBER OF SCOTTISH-DOMICILED HN ENTRANTS FROM SCOTTISH COLLEGES TO UNDERGRADUATE (ADVANCED STANDING/ARTICULATION)

At the current time, the University does not have internal data to confirm the number of students articulating from college with advanced standing in 2021-22. This document will be updated with that information as soon as it becomes available. However, it should be noted that the University continues in its efforts to maximise the number of articulating students who transition with advanced standing, viewing this as a priority area under the wider widening access agenda. For 2022-23, the provisional target set is 46%, in line with the level achieved in 2020-21, when 46.7% of the eligible cohort followed the advanced standing route. At the time, this was a significant increase on the year previous in 2019-20, when 36.4% progressed this way. More information on steps taken in 2021-22 to enhance performance specific to articulation is given below under section 3.1.1. Information on current and planned future initiatives is also provided in this year's Outcome Agreement.

2.3 NUMBER OF SCOTTISH-DOMICILED FULL-TIME DEGREE ENTRANTS FROM THE **20%** MOST DEPRIVED AREAS

In 2021-22 The University welcomed **151** Scottish-domiciled entrants from the 20% most deprived areas in the country (CoWA measure), equating to **7.9%** of the SDUE population, against the sector-wide target of 10%. This represents a fractional decrease in proportional terms in comparison with the previous year when the University attracted **114** new entrants under the same cohort (7.7%). However, in actual terms, there was significant growth, equating to **37 more students than in 2020-21**.

The University has continued to put significant effort into achieving the sector-wide target of 10% for SIMD20 recruitment. However, as acknowledged by the Commissioner for Widening Access, there are particular demographic challenges in the north-east of Scotland which make it difficult for local universities to achieve this target, thereby recognising this may not be the most appropriate measure for the region.

2.4 NUMBER OF SCOTTISH-DOMICILED UNDERGRADUATE ENTRANTS WITH CARE EXPERIENCE (CARE EXPERIENCED)

In 2021-22 the University welcomed **19** new SDUE who have experience of being in care. This equated to **0.9%** of the wider SDUE population This represents a slight decrease from 2020-21 when the figures were **20** and **1.3%**. The University met its actual intake target in this area, albeit due to the higher overall SDUE intake, it fell marginally short in proportional terms

The University, as a committed Corporate Parent, will continue to offer access opportunities and support to care experienced applicants and offer holders. All **19** new care experienced entrants are supported by the University in line with its duties as a Corporate Parent, in addition to other care experienced students who are not normally Scottish-domiciled.

2.5 NUMBER OF SCOTTISH-DOMICILED FIRST YEAR ENTRANTS / RETURNING TO STUDY IN YEAR 2

The number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first year entrants returning to study in AY 2 in 2021-22 was 1411 from a population of 1485, equating to a **continuation rate of 95.0%.** This is marginally below the target of 96%, albeit it is higher than the last result pre-pandemic.

2.6 NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

The University is pleased to report a very positive result in the 2022 National Student Survey (published in summer 2021), with the **number of students satisfied with the overall quality of their course sitting at 5.54 above the sector-wide benchmark average,** and in turn, above its own target figure of 4. This adds to the outstanding progress the University has made under the NSS in recent years, building on its efforts in this area during the pandemic to rank an impressive 4th UK-wide; rising from 5th in the previous year.

2.7 GRADUATE OUTCOMES

The following summary is based on the most recent set of results from the Graduate Outcomes Survey, released in 2022. This covered qualifiers who completed their studies during or at the end of AY 2019-20:

- **832** Scottish Domiciled undergraduate qualifiers responded to the survey, up from **726** responses the year prior.
- **799** responders said that they were now in a positive destination, meaning in employment or continuing study. This equates to **96%**, up from **93.7%** the year previous, and in excess of the projected 94%.
- A total of **628** respondents were in employment, and out of this, **431*** were in professional employment, meaning a graduate-level position. This equates to **68.6%***, a slight decrease of **1.5%** relative to the previous year but above the target of 66%.

The University continues to work to promote the Graduate Outcomes Survey to its student population. Please see more information on how the University will continue to support all of its students to move onto positive destinations post-study in this year's Outcome Agreement.

*This data was provided by the SFC and has been queried over its accuracy. The SFC have confirmed they are reviewing the data, meaning the figures are subject to change.

2.8 NUMBER OF SCOTTISH-DOMICILED UNDERGRADUATE QUALIFIERS

According to the University's internal data **1229** students, who are normally Scottish Domiciled, received an undergraduate qualification from the University in 2021-22. This represents a fractional decrease of **0.48** percentage points in comparison to with 2020-21 when **1235** students received an undergraduate qualification. The University recruited fewer SDUE students in 2017-18 than in 2016-17 and this would, in part, have contributed to this fractional decrease. This metric, and any fluctuation in the number of qualifiers between academic years in particular, is being monitored closely by the University.

3.   **REPORTING ON KEY ACTIONS AND INITIATIVES**

This section of the report provides an overview of progress made by University in delivering key initiatives set out in the 2021-22 Outcome Agreement. Each of the following sub-sections provides examples of work progressed; more information is available upon request.

3.1   OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS (2021-22)

3.1.1   FAIR ACCESS AND TRANSITIONS (2021-22)

The University remains fully committed to fair access and to providing transition support opportunities, especially in light of the Covid-19 crisis and the impact on other education providers and partners. The University delivered all activities and initiatives detailed in the 2021-22 Outcome Agreement that relate to fair access and transitions, with all either successfully completed or ongoing. Examples of work undertaken in this area are given below:

- **North of Scotland University Collaborative Project:** This project was initiated and led by the University, bringing together teams from RGU, SRUC and UHI to tackle the decline in positive destinations for young people across the north and north-east of Scotland. The project ran in AY 2021-22 to help young people who may be considering college or University in the future. 215 people signed up for events as part of the project over the year.
- **University of Aberdeen Business School Outreach Project:** The University's Business School offers a wide portfolio of opportunities for local schools, at both Primary and Secondary level. Covid brought a change to the offering, with many workshops being adapted for online delivery. In AY 2021-22 there was a return to in-person workshops. As part of this, Climate Change was a key topic, while workshops were also delivered in conjunction with the Princes Trust, Aberdeen Football Club Trust and the local branch of the Air Training Corp. Over 2000 pupils from 35 Schools benefitted from interactions with the Business School last year.

Throughout 2021-22 the University continued to provide a range of support mechanisms for college students who were considering or going through the process of articulating onto one of its programmes; examples below.

- **Articulation Week 2021:** The University ran an Articulation Week event between the 15th and 20th of November 2021. This blended event was aimed at college students who were thinking about the possibility of articulating into the University from an HN programme. Participants were offered a range of online and virtual information awareness raising resources and in-person campus tours.
- **Induction and transition support:** The University Access and Articulation team delivered an on-campus event to support articulation students in order to help the transitional process. This was complemented by specific induction events that each of the academic schools ran for their new articulating students.
- **Engineering Transitional Summer School for Advanced Entry Engineering Students:** In summer 2021, and then again in summer 2022, the University's School of Engineering and Access & Articulation Teams delivered the Engineering Transitional Summer School which supports college students to successfully move onto one of the institutions engineering programmes.

3.1.2   HIGH QUALITY LEARNING, TEACHING AND SUPPORT (2021-22)

Throughout the pandemic the University continued to provide its students with a high quality, safe and supportive learning experience that enabled them to succeed in their studies and to participate and engage in their educational experiences. A summary of key activities is given below:

- The University delivered a high quality, blended learning experience which utilised both virtual and in-person learning opportunities, when safe and possible. The University's experiences in this area led to the development of its Delivery of Education Principles for AY 2022-23.
- Throughout AY 2021-22 the University continued to invest in its digitally enhanced teaching spaces and its virtual learning environments. The University was able to make improvements in these areas, despite the supply chain issues that were prevalent over the period.
- Support mechanisms and services for students continued to expand and develop. The University's Student Support Service grew, recruiting to new posts focusing on key issues; for example, on providing support on Gender Based Violence and other complex issues. Due to the success of this post, Student Support are now looking to recruit another member of staff that will focus on

supporting students with issues related to mental health or disability, in addition to other potential appointments.

- In 2021 the University also launched its [Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy](#).

3.1.3 PARTNERSHIP, PARTICIPATION AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE (2021-22)

The University took forward and delivered all of the initiatives and activities described in the Outcome Agreement that would ensure that the student voice is heard and that partnership arrangements grew and were enhanced. An example of two of these is given below:

- The University and the Aberdeen University Students Association (AUSA) remained committed to their Student Partnership Agreement over the year. This commitment has led to increased collaboration on student priorities, coordinated communication principals and, in January 2022, the launch of a Student Mental Health Agreement.
- The University has established an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Events and Engagement Group to facilitate the delivery of an annual programme of EDI events and engagement activities. This group is composed of UoA and AUSA staff, along with representatives from various other fora.

3.1.4 LEARNING WITH IMPACT (2021-22)

Throughout 2021-22 the University took forward all initiatives and activities described in the Outcome Agreement that would enable its students to successfully complete their courses during the pandemic, to flourish in employment, and to lead fulfilling lives. The following is a summary of some of the University's efforts in this area:

- The University has a good understanding of the needs of business, industry and Scotland's economic recovery needs through it works with the Institutional Employer Board and its work with multiple local and regional partnership groups.
- Throughout the year the University continued to provide co-curricular activities designed to enhance the employability of its students.
- The University also continued to make provisions that would help people to upskill and reskill. These efforts included establishing internally provided on-demand learning courses, FutureLearn courses and courses that have been supported by the SFC UpSkilling fund.

3.1.5 PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY (2021-22)

In 2021-22, as the pandemic continued, the University worked hard to ensure the health and wellbeing and best interests of its students and staff. The measures taken were in line with Scottish Government Guidance, with examples given below:

- A comprehensive set of governance arrangements, which were established early on by the University to manage the Covid -19 crisis, continued throughout 2021-22. The Covid-19 Campus Planning Group (CPG) continued to meet on a regular basis throughout the academic year.
- The University maintained its close, positive links with NHS Grampian over the year, with mitigating and responding to issues arising from Covid-19 a key part of that.
- Throughout 2021-22, work was ongoing to enhance its wellbeing support mechanisms and to implement a wellbeing strategy, recognising the challenges of returning on campus.
- The University also invested in air purification units to ensure safety of operation in our larger manually ventilated rooms (i.e., those with windows) that will help to reduce the risk of further infections. This represented a **£600K** initial investment by the University.

3.1.6 EQUALITIES AND INCLUSION (2021-22)

In line with the University's commitment to being 'Inclusive' in its Aberdeen 2040 strategy, the University delivered or began all of the activities and initiatives related to equalities and inclusion, described in the 2021-22 Outcome Agreement. A summary of these is given below:

- The [University's Antiracism Strategy](#) was approved by University Court in March 2022; a bold framework for progress in this area
- 21 Race Equality Champions were appointed in 2021 to support awareness-raising and to support options for reporting racist incidents. The [Online Reporting Tool](#) was also launched.
- In November 2021 the University achieved a Bronze renewal Athena Swan award, with a number of Schools also focused on achieving Silver status; work on this is ongoing.

- The University achieved a silver award in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index 2022 following significant action to support and champion its LGBT+ communities.

3.2   OUTCOMES FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND SOCIAL RENEWAL

3.2.1   RESPONSIVE INSTITUTIONS – HOW PROVISION IS BEING ADAPTED, DEVELOPED OR SHIFTED IN RESPONSE TO STAKEHOLDERS AND INTELLIGENCE

Examples of University responsiveness to employer and industry needs, and to current and future skills requirements are given below.

- The University builds and uses labour market intelligence at multiple levels, utilising nationally available data insights via Microsoft SDS, alongside insights captured via sources like the Employer Board. These data insights are utilised to inform degree programme development to identify careers and employability needs across the institution and for specific programmes.
- The University provides its students and graduates with Labour Market Information (LMI) insights through a range of co-curricular programmes. For example, over the year **287** students took part in the Employability Boost Award programme which focused on learning about the labour market.

Throughout 2021-22 the University continued to play an important role in upskilling and reskilling the existing workforce, with a broad range of initiatives in place in this area:

- The University shared and continues to share upskilling and reskilling opportunities via a range of regional networks such as the Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE).
- The University successfully disbursed its allocation from different funds, including the SFC Upskilling Fund, the NTT fund, and North-East Economic Recovery and Skills Fund. In total, the University expended £1.1m. This equated to 1,117 funded places over the three funds in AY 2021-22.
- There are now 133 online short courses in the On-demand Learning site, providing a growing choice and flexibility for upskillers and reskillers. A 10-credit course in Data Visualisation with Python was introduced to meet the need for shorter, 'bite sized' offerings.
- The short course route to programme study proved popular in 2021-22. This route allowed **94** students without typical academic entry requirements to take two short courses to prove their capability of attaining at Master's level. After successfully completing 30 credits, these students were transferred to a Master's programme.
- The University continues to develop professional development courses and programmes in response to industry skills requirements; for example, the MSc in Energy Transition Systems and Technologies.

Throughout AY 2021-22 the University worked to ensure that staff and students have the necessary meta skills and attributes to be successful via a variety of means:

- For example, a zero-credit course is offered for all undergraduate and postgraduate taught students as well as incorporating additional orientation materials. This course also highlights the established Aberdeen Graduate Attributes initiatives to students. In 2021-22 over **80% of UG** and over **90% of PGT** students completed these courses, and they will continue to run.

3.2.1   CONFIDENT AND HIGHLY CAPABLE – WORK READY GRADUATES

Throughout 2021-22 the University took forward all of the initiatives and activities described in the Outcome Agreement related to supporting its students to become confident and highly capable work ready graduates. Please see some examples of initiatives related to this area of work below:

- The University has active links with Skills Development Scotland, NESA, Opportunity North-East (ONE) and the Regional Skills and Learning Partnership (RSLP). For example, in partnership with ONE, staff from the University's Department of Computing Science were involved in developing sessions designed to connect students with industry.
- The University advertised **1,807** work placements and internship opportunities in AY 2021-22.
- The ABDN Connect and ABDN Community programmes, that were detailed in last year's Outcome Agreement, have been merged into a new pathway called the "ABDN Connect Experience". This has been designed to maximise the value of volunteering, internships and part-time job experiences, and is recognised on transcripts at graduation.

- A new programme launched in Summer 2021, the ABDNGradChallenge, gives graduating students the opportunity to work in teams in a virtual professional environment to solve employer-led challenges; thereby developing professional skills and preparing for professional settings. This programme successfully ran again in June 2022.

3.2.2 KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND INNOVATION

As detailed in the 2021-22 Outcome Agreement the University's knowledge exchange and innovation activities are closely aligned to the priorities outlined in the Aberdeen 2040 strategy. Further information on knowledge exchange at the University is available via the University Innovation Fund plan and report, attached as Appendix 3 to the University's main Outcome Agreement document.

3.2.3 COLLABORATION – EXAMPLES OF NEW COLLABORATION BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS AND OR STAKEHOLDER ON PROVISION

As described in the University's 2021-22 Outcome Agreement local, national and international collaboration and partnerships are an important component of Aberdeen 2040. This commitment, and the associated areas of work, recognises that the University's research, teaching and other efforts benefit from multiple local, national and international collaborations. Examples below.

- The University's work on the new Interdisciplinary themes has gone from strength to strength. By the end of 2021-22 all new Interdisciplinary Directors were in post driving forward their themes, often in collaboration with external partners.
- Throughout 2021-22, Aberdeen continued to work as an active participant in the National Energy Skills Accelerator (NESA). NESA is a regional partnership which involves the University, RGU, NESCol, and other organisations, including Skills Development Scotland. NESA provides a "one stop shop" for industry to access a wide range of energy courses, skills development and R&D capabilities from the partners.
- The Scottish Government has awarded NESA and its partners **£1m** to develop a robust Just Transitions Skills Plan for the energy sector and design scalable pilot programmes to local and regional work force.

In 2021-22 the University actively sought collaboration, with external partners, on estates assets that would improve local coherence and sustainability of provision, while reducing carbon emissions in line with its 2040 vision. Examples are given below:

- The University, Robert Gordon University and community partners benefited from the Regional Recovery Fund from Aberdeen City Council to collaborate in delivering pilot projects to help the community groups within the locality of Old Aberdeen, to develop carbon reduction plans, to identify funding routes to help facilitate delivery, whilst at the same time, providing students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels with quality workplace learning experiences. This has enabled the university to strengthen community relations and to further contribute to wider city and region net zero objectives.
- Throughout 2021-22 and into 2022-23 the University has continued to engage in ongoing civic discission about the establishment of a city-wide heat network.
- The University and Aberdeen Heat and Power continue liaise over bilateral issues, including ongoing discussion about the Hillhead Student Residential Village and a separate arrangement to provide heat to Our Mariscal East Building (part of Mariscal College) in the centre of Aberdeen.

3.2.4 CLIMATE EMERGENCY

The University continued to take urgent action to help reduce or halt climate change, avoid irreversible damage and support environmental sustainability measures. Examples of this are given below:

- Following the University's decision to divest from fossil fuels, investment exposure has dropped from 2.83% in May 2021 to 0.36% in July 2022.
- The University has appointed a Dean for Environmental Sustainability, a role which will provide an interface between academic and operational sustainability activities.
- The University, in collaboration with RGU, has awarded a waste management contract to help it continue its improvements in rates of recycling and in reducing disposal to landfill. This relationship has seen the University's waste management data improve considerably since the contract was awarded, with recycling rates approaching 70% and negligible volumes of materials now sent to landfill (consistently less than 2% of the waste total and normally below 1%).

3.2.5 FAIR WORK (DELIVERY OF THE FAIR WORK PRINCIPLES)

The University is committed to adopting the practices set out in the Scottish Government Fair Work First Policy. A summary of work related to this outcome is given below:

- The University has already made changes to working practices to meet these areas, including being an accredited Living Wage Employer since 2015.
- The University has a long-established partnership working with all recognised Campus Trade Unions.
- The University does not use zero hours contracts inappropriately and the Reward Consultation and Negotiation Group has recently completed a review of the use of Guaranteed Minimum Hours contracts. This review has brought about changes including increasing the minimum default number of hours offered as well ensuring that where members of staff have worked a consistent level of hours, they are offered a fractional contract.

3.3 OUTCOMES FOR RESEARCH

3.3.1 RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

Throughout 2021-22, the University undertook a wide range of activities and initiatives designed to help underpin delivery of research excellence and impact.

REF2021

The University's REF 2021 results, published in May, led to a reduction in REG funding. The University has completed an analysis of its REF performance, consulting widely on ways in which it can improve the quality of its research outputs, impacts and of its research environment. More information on this is available in this year's Outcome Agreement.

Institutions Produce Excellent Research Outputs

Please see a summary of key points related to the production of excellent research outputs below:

- The University is recruiting 20 interdisciplinary research follows, to further enable high-quality work under its five Aberdeen 2040 interdisciplinary challenges, and in parallel, to enhance the sustainability of its research base.
- The number of REF eligible staff increased in academic years 2019-20 and 2020-21.
- The University grew its research income by 10.5% between 2020-21 and 2021-22, with a further increase anticipated for 2022-23.
- Analysis of Web of Science data shows an increase in productivity, with 7% more outputs recorded on the database in 2021 than in 2020. During the same period, the percentage of papers which involved international collaboration also increased from 58% in 2020 to 62% in 2021.

Research Impact Reaches Beyond Academia

As detailed in the University's 2021-22 Outcome Agreement, a number of steps have been taken to enhance the accessibility of outputs. Please see a summary below:

- The University has developed a new open access research publications policy to enable open access to research outputs, in line with funders requirements and initiatives like Plan S. This document has been approved via the University Senate, with roll-out due to follow.
- Engagement with open access remains high – Web of Science recorded a compliance rate of 69% for 2020 and 2021; the University's own records indicate a compliance rate of 74% for 2020 and 77% for 2021, noting this included both externally funded work subject to open access mandates and institutionally funded work:
- The University worked with Aberdeen City Council to secure £5m to establish a Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC), in partnership with NHS Grampian and RGU, funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR).

3.3.2 RESEARCH SUSTAINABILITY

Throughout 2021-22, the University undertook a range of activities and initiatives designed to ensure research sustainability. Please see more information below.

The Research Environment Supports Excellence and Impact

- The University continued to support knowledge exchange and impact. **Nine** Innovation Voucher projects were awarded in AY2021-22, with three being Net-Zero Food & Drink awards. **Four** new KTP projects were approved or started in AY2021-22, with **two** of these building on relationships which started through Innovation Voucher projects.
- The University used its UIF funding to pump prime **16** projects spanning its full research capacity, all directed towards working with industry or impact through knowledge exchange.
- The University also provided pump prime funding to **53** projects to support interdisciplinary research and impact.

Support for PhD Students

The University continues to offer support for PGR students who have been impacted by Covid-19 and an additional 75 awards have been made since August 2021.

- The University has continued to monitor the effects of Covid-19 on PhD research projects via the formal 30 Month Review Exercise for ongoing and insurmountable Covid impacts.
- The University is also focused on enhancing supervisor training including new emphasis on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of PGRs whilst also protecting their own mental health through the Student Minds 'Look after Your mate' programme.

3.3.3 RESEARCH CULTURE

As a research-led institution, the University provides its entire community of staff and students with a robust and engaging research culture. Throughout 2021-22 the University undertook a series of actions or initiatives designed to strengthen and further enhance this culture. Please see examples below:

- In AY 2021-22 the University had a Research Culture Task and Finish Group. This group reported in March 2022 with a series of recommendations linked to developing research careers, improving the experience of working in research, supporting inclusive and respectful environments, and changing how we do research.
- Under a Research Culture Oversight Group, an action plan is in development to support implementation of the recommendations and to ensure ownership in improving our environment for research excellence.
- The University has signed the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA). Subsequent to this the University reviewed its recruitment, promotions and research assessment processes and practices to ensure that they were DORA compliant.
- An institutional policy on responsible use of metrics is in development and is likely to be approved later year (2022).

Institutions Implement the Research Integrity and Researcher Development Concordats

The Researcher Development Concordat is embedded within the University's wider research culture work. As standard practice, the University continues to monitor closely its compliance with the Concordat on Research Integrity. Work in 2021-22 focused on strengthening the University's research ethics framework for non-clinical, non-Home Office regulated research.

4. REFLECTIONS ON HOW THE UNIVERSITY'S LEARNING AND TEACHING STRATEGIES ARE ADAPTING TO THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL AND BLENDED LEARNING

The University has reflected on how its learning and teaching strategies have adapted to the opportunities and challenges of the digital and blended learning. Examples are given below:

- The University conducted an evaluation of the principles of blended learning. A copy of the report generated by this evaluation is available here.
- The Principles for the Delivery of Education were developed, in part, from the evaluation of blended learning (above), but also informed by a review of internal and external sector evidence. Examples of activities and infrastructure which demonstrate these Principles, and which incorporate digital and blended learning opportunities include:
    - **Active Learning:** Further investment has been made to increase the number of spaces capable of hybrid and digitally enhanced teaching

- o **Community Building:** Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) has been piloted in the School of Social Science. A poster illustrating 'The Global Classroom in American Politics' pilot was awarded the Highly Commended poster prize at the Annual Academic Development Symposium 2022.
- o **Assessment:** The importance of Academic Integrity in the context of digital assessments, has been promoted and supported through the development of additional guidance for staff, an Ensuring Academic Integrity infographic and an Academic Integrity Guide for Students.
- o **Feedback on Assessment:** Focus on Feedback webpages for staff were redeveloped and promoted as were the students' Your Academic Feedback pages. A video for students explaining how academic feedback may be provided and how they can use it was created. A series of case studies illustrating Assessment and Feedback in Online & Blended Learning good practice were written and disseminated.
- o **Accessibility & Inclusivity:** An Inclusivity & Accessibility in Education Framework has been developed to reflect and support the University's commitment to inclusive and accessible education. The Framework draws together guidance, policies, resources, and specialist training provided to staff and students incorporating both digital an in-person teaching environments.
- The University has produced a toolkit for staff to support them to create enhanced blended learning and make use of new teaching environments – which the University will continue to add to and develop.
- A 4-week Micro-credential, 'Enhancing your Online Teaching for 2021-22', was developed and delivered in response to staff requests for further development.

5. **REPORTING ON EARLY MITIGATIONS IN PLACE TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES MOVING INTO AY 2022-23**

   Please refer to the University's 2022-23 Outcome Agreement.

6. **REPORTING ON THE UTILISATIONS AND IMPACT OF ADDITIONAL IN-YEAR FUNDING ALLOCATED BY THE SFC**

   The University provides full, comprehensive reports on the utilisation and impact of additional in-year funding allocated by the SFC. See some examples below:

   - **SFC Upskilling Fund:** The University successfully disbursed all of its allocation from the SFC Upskilling Fund in AY 2021-22. Through the SFC Upskilling Fund, the University allocated 506 free places on online short courses. These courses have allowed people to upskill and reskill in key areas. A case study, on a student who directly benefitted from the Upskilling Fund can be viewed here.
   - **National Transition Training Fund (NTTF):** A total of 725 funded places were allocated via the SFC Upskilling Fund and the National Transition Fund (which is supported by the Scottish Government and the SFC), equating to £770,295 in funding. A case study, on a student who directly benefitted from the NTTF can be viewed here.
   - **Digital Inclusion Fund:** The University successfully disbursed all of its allocation from the Digital Inclusion Fund in 2021-22. The fund was utilised to set up a service that would provide a loan of digital equipment (e.g., laptops and Wi-Fi dongles) to students in need of this type of support. Every student, who applied for a loan of equipment in AY 2021-22 and was assessed by the University's Student Support team as being eligible, was given assistance by this scheme.

Appendix 1: SFC National Table of Measures

Please note that the 2014/15 – 2021/21 data shown in this table is the official data from the Scottish Funding Council. The information displayed for 2021/22 is based on the University's own internal data and is provision at this point; finalised in December 2022.

University Outcome Agreement Impact Framework: Supporting Data

Measure		Actual				Provisional	2021-22 Targets with RAG rating
		2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	
A	Number of Scottish-domiciled Undergraduate Entrants	1,307	1,474	1,551	1,571	2,023	1,993
B	Total number of Scottish-domiciled HN entrants from Scottish colleges to undergraduate programmes	211	212	185	137	tbc	253 (RAG tbc)
	Number of Scottish-domiciled HN entrants from Scottish colleges to undergraduate programmes with Advanced Standing	37	51	71	64	tbc	119 (RAG tbc)
	Proportion of Scottish-domiciled HN entrants from Scottish colleges to undergraduate programmes with Advanced Standing	17.5%	24.1%	38.4%	46.7%	tbc	47% (RAG tbc)
C	COWA measure: Number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree entrants from the 20% most deprived postcodes	72	60	124	116	151	151
	COWA measure: Proportion of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree entrants from the 20% most deprived postcodes	6.0%	4.4%	8.6%	7.9%	7.9%	8.2%
D	Number of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants with care experience	11	26	20	21	19	19
	Proportion of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants with care experience	0.8%	1.8%	1.3%	1.3%	0.9%	1.0%
E	Total number of full-time first year SDUE	1,549	1,190	1,410	1,460	1,485	1,460
	Number of full-time first year SDUE retained	1,473	1,138	1,326	1,423	1,411	1,416
	Proportion of full-time first year SDUE retained	95.1%	95.6%	94.0%	97.5%	95.0%	97.0%
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	1.91	2.79	7.51	5.54	
G1	The number of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey	687	726	832			
	The proportion of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey in a positive destination	656	680	799			
	The number of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey in a positive destination	95.5%	93.7%	96.0%			
G2	The number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey in employment	506	536	628			
	The number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey employed at 'Professional' level or above	355	376	431			
	The proportion of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey employed at 'Professional' level or above	70.2%	70.1%	68.6%			
H	Number of Scottish-domiciled Undergraduate Qualifiers	1309	1329	1524	1234	1,229	

Green = Target met or exceeded, Amber = Marginally short of target, Red = Short of Target

*The actual data for 2017-28 to 2020-21 is provided by the SFC via HESA.

* The data for 2021-22 is internal data generated by the University where it is available (aside from NSS data which is provided externally) and is currently classed as provisional. This means the figures here are subject to possible change.

* Please note that 2018-19 and 2019-20 figures for measure G2, 2019-20 figures for measures F and H and all 2020-21 figures are impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and may not be directly comparable to other years.

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UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITIES INNOVATION FUND (UIF) PLAN 2022/23

NOTE: this will be edited down to four pages in final version submitted to SFC on 5 December 2022, in line with SFC guidance.

The University of Aberdeen's knowledge exchange and innovation activities continue to be closely aligned to the following commitments from the Aberdeen 2040 strategy:

- Listen to and work with external stakeholders regionally and globally to build partnerships that deliver imaginative solutions to societal and industrial challenges;
- Develop a research portfolio that promotes national and international collaboration with stakeholders, including companies, organisations and governments;
- Excel in research that addresses the climate emergency, enables energy transition and the preservation of biodiversity.

The University of Aberdeen will use its Outcome Grant to deliver a programme of activities to meet the seven agreed UIF Outcomes. The University will continue to work collaboratively with other HEIs, with regional and national partners and with industry to deliver these objectives. The University confirms its ability to utilise and match the Platform Grant.

The University confirms that it will work towards the following objectives:

- Be recovery focused and evidenced by learning from AY 2021-22 and consultation/collaboration with stakeholders at local and/or national level such as local authorities and Scottish Enterprise.
- Demonstrate a strong commitment to helping Scotland achieve its green recovery ambitions, a well-being economy and just transition to a net-zero carbon society through knowledge exchange, CPD, spin-out and start-up support.

The University of Aberdeen's Vice-Principal for Regional Engagement is responsible for leading the development and implementation of a strategy for the University to make a comprehensive and effective contribution to the economic, social and cultural activity of the region.

The University has enhanced its relationships with key regional stakeholders during 2021/22, through engagement in the refresh of the Regional Engagement Strategy, taking a leading role in the development of the North-East Scotland Green Freeport Innovation Strategy and in our partnership in the National Energy Skills Accelerator. This partnership approach will continue in 2022/23, with the University working with both regional councils in the Just Transition programmes (Aberdeen City Net Zero Delivery Unit and Aberdeenshire Council Climate Ready Aberdeen).

Commitment to Collaboration across the Sector via Universities Scotland RCDG

Aberdeen will continue to work collaboratively with other institutions through the Universities Scotland Research and Commercialisation Directors' Group (RCDG) and with the UIF Collaboration Manager. The University will continue to be an active participant in all of the collaborative clusters and will contribute to workshops and other collaborative activities.

The focus in 2022/23 will be on activities related to the innovation themes of the Aberdeen City Region Deal (ACRD), including Energy, Lifesciences, Food, Drink and Agriculture, Digital and Entrepreneurship and Tourism, which map well on to a number of the Interdisciplinary Challenges identified as a feature of the Aberdeen 2040 strategy. The University's Interdisciplinary Challenges are:

- Energy Transition
- Environment and Biodiversity
- Health, Nutrition and Wellbeing
- Data and Artificial Intelligence
- Social inclusion and cultural diversity

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The University will partner with Scottish Enterprise and Opportunity North-East (ONE) in 2022/23 to support initiatives in place for the launch of the BioHub and SeedPod facilities and the Energy Transition Zone programmes around innovation and skills.

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

- As one of the North-East of Scotland's key anchor institutions and as noted above, the University of Aberdeen is committed to working with regional, national and international stakeholders to build partnerships that deliver imaginative solutions to societal, economic and industrial challenges in Scotland and internationally.
- Collaboration with the Innovation Centres will bring additional benefits for our industry partners and opportunities for researchers to address industry needs.
- The University will continue to work in partnership with the Net Zero Technology Centre in 2022/23, building upon successes in 2021/22 including six new research and development relationships, to meet the needs of industry for innovation for a Just Transition.
- As part of this relationship, the University will continue to add to the industry collaborations secured by the National Decommissioning Centre (NDC), with eight completed projects to date and a further 13 projects or partnerships underway in 2021/22. The University will make available to industry the world class immersive simulation suite.
- In 2021/22, the University of Aberdeen took over as Chair of the National Energy Skills Accelerator (NESA) - a partnership between ETZ Ltd., Skills Development Scotland, RGU, NESCol and the University of Aberdeen working together to address industry's skills needs for energy transition. To date NESA has secured three MOUs with industry partners for future skills needs. Work will continue in partnership in 2022/23 to deliver the commitments within the North-East Tertiary Pathfinder *Energy Transition Skills Pathway* project and the newly awarded £1M Just Transition Fund project on *Skills for Energy Transition*.
- The University will continue to engage fully with the Energy Transition Zone (ETZ) and will participate in opportunities for supporting start-up businesses in energy transition technologies.
- Green Freeport: The University led the innovation strand as part of development of the North-East Green Freeport bid, working with partners across the region including RGU, local authorities, enterprise agencies, port authorities and industry. [To be updated prior to SFC submission]
- Through the road to COP26 programme the University provided a number of events for engagement and supported staff and student attendance at COP26. The University is providing three participants to COP27 in 2022.
- The University of Aberdeen secured support for two Entrepreneurs in Residence funded by the Royal Society during 2022. One is focused on the School of Engineering and on translating academic innovation in energy transition into industry; the other is focused on student entrepreneurship in Computing Science. Our plan is to extend these into 2023 and to add a third Entrepreneur in Residence, focussing on innovation and translational research in the medical sciences.
- Work will continue with Opportunity North-East to develop and support the ambitions of the BioHub located on the Foresterhill Health Campus. The BioHub will host spin out and start-up companies in the life and data sciences and we expect these companies to make use of specialist research facilities located in the University.
- Research in health and nutrition from our Rowett Institute is an equally important research strength for the University and the new SeedPod facility under development by ONE will provide opportunities for the food and drink industry in Scotland to work with researchers from the Rowett Institute to develop innovative products and services.

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

- Aberdeen participates in the UIF Challenge Fund network, organised by the UIF Collaboration Manager which focusses on opportunities for Scottish universities and industry to work collaboratively.
- The University will continue to provide opportunities for partnership working with industry sectors, in particular with the ACRD partners, with an emphasis on developing more strategic

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relationships with shared goals, and demonstrating to businesses the long term benefits of partnership.

- A programme of training for researchers focused on the collaborative competencies to enhance engagement with businesses and impact from research will continue.
- Aberdeen continues to support the simplification of processes and promoting efficient commercialisation, as demonstrated by our commitment to using standard templates wherever possible and our track record in commercialisation. Aberdeen is a member of the Universities Scotland RCDG Contracts Sub-Group which has already provided a range of commonly used contracts supporting simplification and harmonisation of the process for businesses to access knowledge within all universities. The University will continue to promote good practice within the partnership with the ACRD and other multi party collaborations.
- Key priorities for 2022/23 include reviewing the University's framework and policies for supporting knowledge exchange against best practice in the sector
- The University plans to enhance the team supporting enterprise, innovation and business engagement under the leadership of the Vice-Principal for Regional Engagement
- The University will work in the regional Triple Helix Group with NHS Grampian, RGU and ONE to identify and exploit opportunities for collaborative working.
- The ECITB approved CPD course on Introduction to Offshore Decommissioning was delivered three times in 2021/22 and will be run again in 2022/23. An IChemE approved course on Biological Wastewater Treatment and Anaerobic Digestion is available online on demand. In 2023, the University will co-host the 13th International Gut Microbiome Conference in Aberdeen. Further CPD courses on Energy Transition and CCUS are in development for 2022/23 or 2023/24.

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

- Aberdeen's focus on the Interdisciplinary Challenges has provided opportunities for showcasing innovation to industry and for engagement with industry.
- Aberdeen has evidenced its commitment to engaging and collaborating with other universities and the enterprise agencies through our partnership approach in ACRD, but also the ongoing commitment to the long-standing partnership of the North of Scotland KTP centre.
- Staff development activities will continue, providing in-house training to staff and extending to externally sourced training and conferences as required.
- The University will continue to work with industry through other routes through the Innovation Centres and Interface and through KTP projects supported by the North of Scotland KTP Centre.
- The University will work with Scottish Enterprise to develop a strategy to enhance the infrastructure for knowledge exchange and innovation, complementing partnerships already in place with ONE for the BioHub and SeedPod, and the future relationship with TechScaler.
- Work with partners within NESA to deliver the awarded projects under Scottish Government's Just Transition Fund and SFC Pathfinder programme for the development of skills relating to Energy Transition.

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

- The University of Aberdeen is fully engaged with the Entrepreneurship group established as a subgroup of RCDG and is fully supportive of its work with regard to the plans in the SFC review for the Entrepreneurial Campus Strategy.
- In 2021/22, the University of Aberdeen provided support for 46 student entrepreneurs through support such as space in its ABVenture Zone incubator, through microfinance for start-ups and through one-to-one advice. This support will continue during 2022/23.
- 'Lightbulb', the University's business idea competition in 22/23 will continue to run. Responding to student feedback and engagement, Lightbulb was recast as a monthly competition in 2021/22 and will continue in this format in 2022/23.

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- The University will work closely with other regional entrepreneurship support organisations (such as Elevator, ONE, TechX, ETZ, TechScaler Hub).
- Aberdeen will remain an active participant in the Converge Steering Group, Advisory Board and the competitions and has extended its hosting of a Converge Enterprise Executives through to end 2023.
- In 2021/22, the University provided three participants on the MIT Entrepreneurship Development Programme with a further three to participate for 2022/23 and is fully engaged in discussions regarding the potential roll out of key parts of this programme in North-East Scotland.
- Partnering with Scottish Enterprise and others (including the Connected Places Catapult as part of their Innovation Places Leadership Academy) work will continue towards development of a place-based framework for entrepreneurship and innovation.
- The University will seek to engage with Elevator (or another partner) to offer its popular summer accelerator to student entrepreneurs, providing stipends to student participants to encourage inclusivity.
- The University will provide support for a pipeline of spin out companies, including one-to-one support, intellectual property protection and pre-investment incubation assistance.
- In 2022/23, the University will review its Policy on Intellectual Property Exploitation and Revenue Sharing against best practice in the sector.
- The University can continue to support our current Royal Society Entrepreneurs in Residence (EiRs) and will seek to add additional EiRs to support innovation and entrepreneurship across further academic Schools.
- The University will seek support from Scottish Enterprise's High Growth Spin Out Programme with one project funded in 2022/23 and a further three applications in progress.

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

- The University of Aberdeen's 2040 Commitments includes Internationalisation with the aim of "harnessing our research expertise to form partnerships and networks around the world to meet the challenges of our age".
- The University will continue to work with SDI, Invest Aberdeen, Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council (amongst other local and national organisations) to promote Scotland, in particular the North-East of Scotland, for inward investment opportunities. Involvement in ONE's investment through the ACRD into the life sciences and food and drink sectors (through BioHub and SeedPod, respectively) will also promote inward investment through access to research expertise.
- The long-standing partnership with Curtin University in Australia has recently been expanded to include the University of Calgary in Canada in an enhanced partnership to develop innovative solutions to tackle key global issues, including the need to ensure a just energy transition while tackling climate change and securing a sustainable future. The University will provide targeted support to develop the partnerships.

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

- Public engagement has remained a priority during AY 2021/22 and will continue to be a priority in 2022/23. Events delivered in 2021/22 were a mixture of online and in-person but in 2022/23 a programme of completely in-person public engagement events are planned.
- Aberdeen led a successful application for funding to deliver the EXPLORATHON public engagement programme in 2022 and 2023 *(*funded by the EPSRC as part of the UKRI funding guarantee for applications to Horizon Europe*)* with partners at the Universities of Glasgow, Strathclyde and St Andrews.
- In addition to the EXPLORATHON programme, key events in 2020/21 were the Festival of Social Science (FoSS), and British Science Week (BSW). The latter was in-person and included a schools programme and events aimed at general audiences (976 members of the public attended). Plans for 2022/23 include further participation in FoSS and BSW.

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- The University will continue to embed Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) into research design and applications for funding having recruited a PPI group that meets quarterly and that has supported 14 projects to date.
- The University participated in online Doors Open days in 2020 and 2021 but returned to an in-person event in September 2022 with six buildings attracting 1138 members of the public, many of whom do not normally participate in university events.
- Training programmes for researchers (including PGRs) will continue to be delivered as part of these initiatives and also from the Grants Academy to support engagement with a broad range of stakeholders including the public and industry, with a focus on evaluation and on engagement as a route to impact from research.
- In 2021/22, a completed pilot Community Wealth Building project assisted a community group local to the campus to consider their route map for Net Zero and resulted in the group securing £250k of grant funding to implement the strategy. Further projects will be support during 2022/23.

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

- The University will continue to ensure positive promotion of equality and diversity in staff and all who are affected by the use of UIF, through our monitoring of projects support and those engaged.
- In 2021/22, the University developed tools for monitoring and reporting on inclusivity of public engagement events which are now being used for events in our 2022/23 programme, and will be used more broadly to monitor equality and diversity.
- Inclusivity is a core element of the University's Aberdeen 2040 commitments and in participation in the HR Excellence in Research strategy which is overseen by the Postdoctoral Research Committee. The achievements through the Athena Swan Charter underpin work in relation to gender equality. The Race Equality Strategy Group oversees, and drives change with regard to tackling racial inequalities in the University.

Affordable school uniforms: safeguarding Scottish children's right to education

On average, families in the UK spent £337 per year on school uniform for each secondary school child (The Children's Society, 2020). Statutory school uniform policy in Wales and England and non-statutory guidance in Northern Ireland seeks to provide safe-guarding measures to ensure children's right to education including the requirement for Schools to consider lower cost high street alternatives and schools' arrangements with suppliers. No such legislation or national guidance covering the wearing of school uniforms exists in Scotland.

Dr Rachel Shanks, School of Education at the University of Aberdeen has undertaken research to understand the consequence of prohibitive school uniform costs in the Scottish context, finding that whilst 96% of secondary schools in Scotland have a compulsory uniform, of these almost 20% specify an exclusive supplier for school uniform. Following an analysis of 31 of Scotland's 32 local authorities, Shanks also found that whilst £22.5 million in clothing grants has been paid out by local authorities during the 2021-22 school year, only seven local authorities were found to make automatic awards of the school clothing grant when families applied for other benefits such as council tax reduction. Furthermore, just five local authorities were found to pay more than the minimal clothing grant of £100 per pupil, with the highest grant being £145. These findings led Shanks to conclude that young people's right to education could be jeopardised by rising school uniform costs as a result of a 'postcode lottery' of financial aid accessible through only a limited number of local authorities.

Shanks shared these findings in the form of a policy brief and was later invited along with Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG Scotland) and various charities to deliver a series of recommendations at a parliamentary roundtable organised by Fulton MacGregor MSP at the Scottish Parliament on 22nd September, to coincide with the national consultation into school uniform policy. Whilst many schools in Scotland have already reduced uniform costs through removing the requirements for logos and operating a blazer deposit scheme, Shanks recommended that schools could look at further options, such as setting up mechanisms to donate or share second-hand clothing and working with one of 30 dedicated school clothing banks across Scotland.

In response to these recommendations, the Scottish Government has committed to introduce statutory guidance in Scotland to reduce the cost of school uniform, informed by a national Statutory School Uniform Guidance Consultation, launched on May 19th of this year and spearheaded by Shanks' research. It is intended that the results of this consultation will inform national guidance for local authority and school policies in a manner that supports affordable, comfortable and sustainable school uniforms. On 7th October, Shanks was invited to a cost of living surgery in Coatbridge hosted by constituency politicians Fulton MacGregor MSP and Steven Bonnar MSP in response to the rising cost of school uniforms and to encourage constituents to give their views as part of the Scottish Government consultation, which ended 14th October.

Soil science excellence leading to global impact

Pete Smith (FRS, FRSE, FNA, FEurASc, FRSB, F I Soil Sci) is Professor of Soils and Global Change at the Institute of Biological and Environmental Sciences at the University of Aberdeen.

His work on land-based ecosystems and carbon cycling, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, soils, agriculture, food systems, bioenergy, and modelling for climate change mitigation with environmental and agricultural sustainability provide a way forward in the face of a changing world. Through his work, Pete Smith was named in the Reuters hot list in 2021 as the top climate scientist in Scotland, ranking 75th in the world.

His research is a key component of the University of Aberdeen's Centre of Excellence in Soil Science which was awarded the 2021 Queen's Anniversary Prize—the highest Honour for UK further and higher education—in recognition of excellence, innovation and wider impact. Pete's work using whole systems modelling within the GCRF-AFRICAP programme is transforming agriculture and food infrastructure in sub-Saharan Africa for future sustainability and resilience in the face of climate change. The award also recognised the global impact from his innovative *Cool Farm Tool* (CFT), https://coolfarmtool.org/ a free app for farmers and producers to easily calculate their carbon footprint and environmental impact (GHG emissions, soil quality, biodiversity, water use), based on robust scientific data and methods. The tool enables decision making at farm and field-level using "plug-in" parameters to test "what if" scenarios relevant to farm and practices, including coffee, cocoa, and fruit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDEQSCOapQM. The uptake of CFT is expanding globally, with 22,317 registered producers from 150 countries having undertaken 82,598 assessments in 2021 (up 39% from the previous year). This work shows how broad collaboration and community building can bring a science-led innovation to be freely available to tackle climate action in food production. Detailed examples of impact on sustainable production using the CFT include Kellogg and Costco, and can be found at https://coolfarmtool.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Annual-Report-Calendar-Year-2021.pdf. Starbucks have recently joined the alliance in their ambition to reduce the environmental impact within their global supply chain https://coolfarmtool.org/2022/07/starbucks-is-member-of-the-cool-farm-alliance/.

The Cool Farm Tool won Research Project of the Year at The Herald Higher Education Awards in June 2022 https://www.abdn.ac.uk/news/16050/ and is a finalist for the UKRI Green Gown Awards for Institution with Impact, with winners to be announced in November https://www.greengownawards.org/university-of-aberdeen. CFT was presented as a case study in NERC's 2022-2025 Strategic Delivery Plan, published in September https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/NERC020922-StrategicDeliveryPlan2022.pdf

Prof Smith contributed to COP26 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wslobQbazSg and produced a podcast https://climatenow.com/podcast/saving-two-birds-with-one-stone/ to discuss his work within the first collaboration of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) in June 2021 to find solutions benefitting both climate change and biodiversity https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2021-06/20210609_workshop_report_embargo_3pm_CEST_10_june_0.pdf

Prof Smith is Science Director of the Scottish ClimateXChange, which provides independent advice, analysis and research to guide policy development for climate change and net zero transition. In 2021 Pete was appointed to the First Minister's Environmental Council of experts to advise the Scottish government on global best practice in tackling the climate emergency.

22 November 2022

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

ANNUAL STATEMENT ON RESEARCH GOVERNANCE & INTEGRITY, 2021/22

1.   PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

1.1   This paper invites members of the University Court to approve the Annual Research Governance & Integrity Statement for academic year 21/22. Once approved, the statement will be published on our institutional Research Governance webpages.

2.   PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	University Research Committee Senior Management Team	28 September 2022 03 November 2022
Further consideration/ approval required by		

3.   RECOMMENDED ACTION

3.1   The **University Court** is invited to **approve** the proposed governance statement.

4.   DISCUSSION

4.1   As a signatory to the Universities UK 'Concordat to Support Research Integrity', the University is required to publish an annual statement summarising the actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen research integrity across the institution. This statement (once approved by University Court) will be published on the University's Research Governance webpages.

4.2   In addition to the activities described in the statement, Court is reminded that, in response to the recommendations arising from the University effectiveness and governance reviews, as of session 2022/23 the Research Policy Committee is known as the University Research Committee (URC), and has become a committee of University Senate (instead of University Court). Up until the end of session 2021/22 an external member from University Court was a member of this committee but has now demitted office.

4.3   The URC now reports to the University Senate. The committee continues to meet four times per year.

5.   FURTHER INFORMATION

5.1   Further information is available from Professor Marion Campbell (Vice Principal for Research), m.k.campbell@abdn.ac.uk, or Marlis Barraclough, Senior Policy Advisor, Research & Innovation, m.barraclough@abdn.ac.uk or Dawn Foster, Research Policy & Governance Officer, Research & Innovation, dawn.foster@abdn.ac.uk

22 November 2022

Confidentiality Status: Open

RESEARCH GOVERNANCE & INTEGRITY

ANNUAL REPORT TO COURT ACADEMIC YEAR 2021/22

Introduction

The University of Aberdeen seeks to achieve the highest standards in its research governance arrangements, recognising both the importance and centrality of rigour and integrity to high quality research performance. The University recognises that research integrity is a primary concern of all those involved with research, and that it is vital to have in place robust and effective processes for dealing with misconduct.

The Research Policy Committee (RPC) which is chaired by the Vice Principal (Research), has oversight of research ethics and governance issues; developing and reviewing institutional policy on research ethics and governance; receiving reports from Ethics Boards and Committees; undertaking ethics health checks within Schools. Responsibility for facilitating ethical approval for research projects and the promotion of good research practice rests with six discipline-based ethics committees and boards that support non-clinical related research and research that does not require a licence under Home Office regulations.

The RPC membership comprises of representatives from all Schools (normally the School Director of Research), representatives from the relevant Professional Services, an Early Career Researcher, a Postgraduate Research Student and an external member from University Court. It meets four times per year.

In addition to the work of the RPC, the University implements an ongoing programme of continuous improvement of its research governance arrangements. These are informed by a combination of initiatives such as the University's strategic plan for research, the institutional Risk Register and Risk framework to identify and mitigate research governance risks, learning from internal audits and funders' assurance requirements, voluntary instruments and codes of practice. Substantive developments and activities are discussed in turn below.

Research during the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic

In line with the gradual removal of COVID-19 restrictions across the UK (replaced by governments' guidance), coupled with the gradual return to campus for staff and students, in April 2022 the University Campus (Research) Planning Group ceased to perform an oversight role in monitoring of research activity. Responsibility for oversight of research returned to the pre-pandemic arrangements (i.e. approval of travel and fieldwork arrangements by the Head of School and ethical approval provided by the internal Ethics Review Boards).

The Campus Planning Group continue to meet to discuss any matters relating to increased activity on campus, and in the event of any changes to the COVID-19 situation or national guidance, will resume additional oversight of research activities if required.

Strategy

The University launched its 2040 Strategy in February 2020 and work continues on its implementation.

Five Interdisciplinary Research Directors were appointed to provide leadership in research development under the five Interdisciplinary Challenge areas as follows: Data & Artificial Intelligence; Environment & Biodiversity; Health, Nutrition & Wellbeing; the Centre for Energy Transition; and Social Inclusion & Cultural Diversity.

These new roles will encourage and support our academic colleagues in engaging with interdisciplinary work (as per the increased focus on interdisciplinary working, endorsed by the UK Research Funding Councils) and will ensure that our research activities are impactful and enhance our reputation for world-class research.

Research Governance Framework

The University's Research Governance Handbook (explaining the standards, principles and expectations for research ethics and governance) underwent an annual review with a revised version approved by RPC in November 2021. Updates included information on mandatory online training in Research Ethics & Governance for all PGR and staff applicants for ethical approval (including exemptions for staff who have already completed the 'Good Clinical Practice' (GCP) or 'Good Research Practice' (GRP) training; reference made to the separate ethics committee established in the School of Biological Sciences; amendments made to correctly re-title references made to the UK GDPR (following the UK's withdrawal from the European Union); guidance on data gathering for University business (for non-research purposes); and revisions to the guidance text on inventorship; a minor revision to the stage 1 investigation process in the procedure for reporting allegations of unacceptable research conduct.

A Code of Practice for Safeguarding in Research has been developed and will be submitted to the formal review and approval process during session 2022/23.

Ethics Advisory Group

During session 2021/2022, the Research Policy Committee approved the establishment of a new sub-group, the Ethics Advisory Group.

This group has been created to further the overall aims of the University's ethics and governance policies and processes; to oversee the activities of individual ethics boards thereby ensuring the highest ethical standards in research practice; to protect the safety, dignity, welfare and wellbeing of research participants; to protect researchers from harm and unjust criticism; to take account of legitimate interests of individuals, groups and communities in the University's research as they relate to ethics and governance; and to provide reassurance to the public of the integrity of the University's research.

The group is comprised of the Dean for Academic Research Partnerships & Research Governance (Chair), the Chairs of the internal ethics boards (Arts, Social Sciences & Business; Physical Science & Engineering; Psychology; Biological Sciences; Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition; and the Rowett.

The group met for the first time in May 2022, and items of business included a review of research ethics training and the development of a centralised ethics appeal process.

The group will meet four times per year and will report to the University Research Committee under the revised research committee governance structure.

Research Ethics Project (Worktribe Ethics)

As of March 2022, the University acquired a digital solution for research ethics approval from Worktribe. The University has already adopted the research awards management system within the Worktribe package, thereby enabling integration between grant applications and post-award monitoring and the ethics approval process.

The ethics module will be implemented across the University on a rolling schedule during session 2022/23 and will be adopted by each of the six internal ethics boards in turn (Committee for Research Ethics & Governance in Arts, Social Sciences & Business; the Physical Sciences & Engineering Ethics Board; the School of Biological Sciences Ethics Board; the School of Psychology Ethics Board;

the Rowett Ethics Board, and the School Ethics Review Board (Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition)).

The new ethics module will provide increased visibility and awareness of our ethics procedures across the University community, enhanced reporting capabilities, and a streamlined system encompassing best practice in ethical review, which will also improve the overall governance of our research activity.

Research Culture

- **Research Culture Task & Finish Group**

The work of this group (originally established in 2020 to review the research culture at the University and to propose suggestions for improvement) formally concluded with a report to University Senate in May 2022.

The final report from the group proposed 22 recommendations on the key themes of developing research careers, improving the experience of working in research, supporting inclusive and respectful environments, changing how we do research. The recommendations were made with the aim of making the University a place that researchers want to come to do their research, to develop their skills and to contribute to the ongoing success of the University.

The report received the endorsement of the University Senate, and an action plan has been developed to implement these recommendations.

- **Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers**

A Concordat Steering Group was formed in November 2021 and has produced a series of recommendations which have been agreed by University Research Committee and the Senior Management Team, and are due to be discussed by the University Senate in November 2022. These recommendations relate to early career researchers on research-only contracts and cover: support and time for research independence, time for professional development activities, mentoring for ECRs, clearer criteria for promotion for research-only contracts (as part of the ongoing Promotions Review Group), ringfenced internal funds for ECRs, and close alignment of this work with the ongoing work on research culture, due to resume in October following the completion of the above-mentioned report from the Task and Finish Group.

The new ECR development programme will also be tailored to support the development of an inclusive research culture. In order to contribute to the University-wide focus on employability, and to meet our responsibilities under the Concordat, Researcher Development will work closely with HR and with the PGR School to ensure that ECRs and PGRs are supported to develop career strategies and consider options outside academia, as part of this development piece.

A formal Concordat action plan is due for submission in February and will align strands of work across these different teams and sections where relevant, providing a supportive environment for researchers to thrive.

- **UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN)**

The University of Aberdeen was one of the first 10 UK universities to join the UKRN, a network established to improve the rigour, robustness and quality of UK academic research output. Our institutional lead continues to drive continuous improvement in our research activities.

- **San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)**

The University became a signatory to this declaration in June 2020, and (following a pause in implementation activity due to the ongoing impact of Covid-19) a DORA Implementation Officer was appointed in March 2022. DORA compliance is being taken forward as part of the actions and recommendations of the University's Research Culture Task and Finish Group. This has involved

developing DORA guidance for the Recruitment Toolkit and participation in the Promotions Review Exercise. A Policy on the Responsible use of Metrics has been produced and a Statement on Responsible Research Assessment is also in development.

Animal Welfare and Ethical Review

The University of Aberdeen Ethical Review Committee (ERC) acts on behalf of the Establishment Licence Holder to ensure that the University meets its obligations under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA). The ERC discharges functions of an Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body, as required under the ASPA legislation, and has oversight of all matters related to animal welfare, care and use at the University.

At the ERC's annual meeting, the University Code of Practice for Research Involving the Use of Animals was reviewed and updated. The ERC's workload for the preceding year was reviewed and it was noted that the bimonthly ERC online meetings continued to work well. Following a recruitment exercise, a new lay ERC Convenor, was appointed and the official handover was completed following the annual meeting in February 2022. The ERC will look to make the online in-term review a regular aspect of the ERC's work, with an event to be scheduled in AY 2022/23.

Graduate School

All PGR students are required to undertake mandatory Research Integrity within the first six months of their start date. The purpose of the training is to underline the highest standards of academic integrity expected by the institution and to ensure that they are adhered to. Routine checks for completion are carried out at the point of the first formal review exercise at 6 months (6 Month Review exercise) within which specific reference to completion of research integrity training is contained. This process complements a formal communication at 3 months from the Graduate School about training expectations and requirements.

In AY 2021/22 the PGR Committee approved the introduction of the mandatory submission of PGR work for assessment via text similarity checking software in order to identify any instances of academic misconduct and as a mechanism to introduce support and/or additional training for individuals. Guidance documents for PGRs and academic supervisors are available with formal investigation processes clearly outlined. In addition an academic writing adviser has been recruited (part-time) to develop additional support for PGRs in relation to integrity and the avoidance of plagiarism during AY 2022/23.

An external audit of the formal review processes identified the need to improve engagement with the review exercise and recommended the exercises be tailored to the specific time point of the student journey. This has been undertaken and, subject to committee approval, the 6-month review has been revised to focus on training needs.

The Graduate School also works in partnership with the Researcher Development team and their work on research culture to ensure the institution adheres to the highest standards of academic integrity and provides an environment for researchers to thrive.

Research Misconduct

As a signatory to the Universities UK's Concordat to Support Research Integrity, we are committed to the ongoing development of a research culture that supports open and transparent investigation of potential misconduct, ensuring that all staff, researchers and students have confidence in our procedures and are supported throughout the process. As part of the ongoing review of associated policies (and as noted earlier in this report), a minor revision was approved to the procedure for reporting allegations of unacceptable research conduct. The changes confirmed that the stage 1 investigation process will ensure that, further to the initial complaint being raised, the complainant has been provided with sufficient opportunity to effectively state their complaint, which may involve offering them an interview with the stage 1 panel.

Summary of Investigations of Research Misconduct

The table below sets out the broad categories of queries, investigations and findings in relation to research misconduct during academic year 2021/22. Appropriate action was taken where allegations were upheld following further investigation.

	No. of 'near misses' (not leading to an allegation) or resolved via informal resolution	No. of allegations which resulted in an investigation	No. of allegations upheld (in whole or in part)
Research undertaken without ethical approval	1		1
Authorship	1		
Damage to research experiments			1

- In order to address the learning points highlighted by the above ethics approval incidents (as both instances occurred within the same School), further engagement was undertaken with senior staff within the School, coupled with a presentation to the entire School, to ensure improved awareness and understanding of research ethics and integrity and to provide further guidance on the research ethics approval process.
- Authorship was raised at Research Policy Committee to promote greater awareness of these issues, and the adoption of CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy) was discussed. The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) guidelines are promoted to our research community and are regularly consulted in relation to authorship queries and also when required to investigate authorship disputes.
- Training and awareness-raising is an ongoing responsibility and work will continue in the next academic session to continue to highlight these issues amongst our researcher community.
- The adoption of the Worktribe Ethics application process (and the associated training programme) in session 2022/23 will also enhance researcher awareness of ethical approval requirements.

Further information is available from Professor Marion Campbell (m.k.campbell@abdn.ac.uk).

Professor Marion Campbell
Vice Principal for Research
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[22 November 2022]

22 November 2022

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

ANNUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT 2021 - 2022

1.   PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

1.1   This paper is to provide an update, as Court has legal responsibility for compliance with health and safety law, for the University. It includes a report on performance against the Health and Safety Management Plan for the academic year 2021 to 2022, information on other significant health and safety related issues during that period, the matters monitored by the University Health and Safety Committee and some Accident and Incident Statistics for the year.

1.2   This paper is provided for information.

2.   PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION

2.1   Progress against the Health and Safety Management Plan is a standing item at the quarterly meetings of the University's Health and Safety Committee. This report was shared with the committee at its most recent meeting, on 1st November.

3.   RECOMMENDED ACTION

3.1   Court is invited to note, and discuss, the contents of this report.

4.   DISCUSSION

4.1.   The University Health and Safety Committee met at three monthly intervals throughout the academic year, as usual. Additional meetings had been taking place more frequently to discuss Covid-related health and safety matters between Committee meetings. However, these became unnecessary as they were included on the agenda of the fortnightly HR led meetings with the Trades Union meetings. The Trade Unions were also represented at the Campus Planning Group, which is an Executive group formed in line with Scottish Government Covid guidance for the sector. However, Covid related matters continued to be on the main agenda of the committee until recently.

4.2.   The H&S Committee agreed fixed quarterly periods for reporting, in order to facilitate like for like comparisons of data. Standing items for the meeting are:

- Health and Policy Review Program
- Health and Safety Management Plan
- Wellbeing Strategy and Annual Plan
- Health and Safety Training Update
- Fire Safety Report
- Accidents and Near Misses Update
- Report from Sub-committees.

4.3.   The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Plan for 2020/21, showing progress against the tasks as of 30th September 2022 is attached at **Appendix A.** Other significant issues and additional detail is included below.

4.4.   At the start of the academic year progress on some strategic priorities was impeded by a combination of continuing demands on the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team due to the Covid 19 pandemic and posts being vacant for long periods. However, all the posts in the team were filled by mid-July. The team has been renamed the Health, Safety and Resilience (H, S & R)

Team, to reflect the appointment of a second Business Continuity Adviser and the move of the Wellbeing Team (3 posts) to Student Experience. The teams work closely together, however, and the progress against the Wellbeing Annual Plan is still monitored by the H&S Committee.

4.5. The completion of the three mandatory health and safety e-learning modules was suspended during the period of the pandemic, except for new appointments, as most staff were not on campus (so most of the content was not appropriate). However, these were reviewed and revised before being reissued to the whole University on 1st March 2022.   In September the overall rate was approximately 69%, with the average completion rate across the three modules for individual Schools and Departments ranging between 35% and 94%. Completion rates continue to be monitored by the H&S Committee.

4.6. Fire safety remains a priority. The University is planning for changes to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service response to automatic alarms, (although the original timescale for implementation of April 2023 may now change). The fire risk assessment review program has been maintained and issues raised by these, and insurers, are to be addressed by a new working group in 2022/23.

4.7. Comparisons of accidents and incidents data between recent years is fraught with issues at present, because the changes due to the pandemic, and the move of many staff to different working patterns (i.e. hybrid working) which makes like for like comparisons very difficult. There were no incidents reportable to the enforcing authority during the last year and there was no enforcement action taken against the University. However, under-reporting is suspected and will be addressed as part of changes to the internal reporting system in 2023. Given the above, only a simple summary of the accidents and incidents statistics is included in this report (i.e. not broken down into time intervals and causes) and some Covid related absence data is also included at **Appendix B.** The latter appears to show that absences due to Covid are more significant than any work-related accidents or ill health, even though the data is only for days lost and does not show the impact upon productivity of those who work from home and/or are less productive, due to symptoms, but continue to be "at work".

4.8. Three Sub-committees report into the Health and Safety Committee, the Radiation Hazards Sub-Committee, the Old Aberdeen Biosafety Committee and the Foresterhill Biosafety Committee. All three committees have met during the academic year 2021-2022. A number of items have been discussed and actioned including:

- Procedures for approving biological work at the new Science Teaching Hub
- Procedures for authorising and recording work with Schedule 5 pathogens and toxins
- Training of relevant technical staff in safe working practices in the Containment Level 3 laboratories
- Disposal of a high activity radioactive sealed source.

4.9. Other significant topics considered by the H&S Committee during the academic year 2021/22, not included above, have included:

- A new procedure for running of equipment out of hours – Led by the school of Engineering.
- Review of the provision of specialist health and safety advice.

4.10. The H, S & R Team worked closely with Estates and Facilities and the School leads on various aspects of the preparations for the opening of the Science Teaching Hub (STH) in January 2022, and throughout the subsequent phased occupation of the building. This has included carrying out pre-occupation and post occupation fire risk assessments, delivering evacuation lift training, advising on post-handover safety related issues, agreeing standards for various items and processes and discussion of procedures to be adopted for this multi-occupied building. Some of the responsibilities for the latter are still being finalised at the time of writing but are largely complete. The Science Teaching Hub Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee (Chaired by Project Director) has oversight of STH activities and has representation from each school and the H, S & R Team. It currently meets monthly and disseminates outcomes and activities to schools. A dedicated member of the technical team has operational oversight for risk assessment and health and safety within the STH and for all relevant activities.

4.11. When the pressures of work associated with the pandemic began to reduce, and the vacant posts in the H, S & R Team had been filled, it became possible to devote more time to a more long-term plan for health and safety management. A 3-year Health and Safety Management Plan was agreed by the H&S Committee and SMT which will to run in synchrony, with the 4-year Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. This is similar to the existing annual plan, first introduced at the University during the academic year 2019-2020. It is split into the sections "Plan, Do, Check, Act", (in line with the Health and Safety Executive guidance and health and safety management, HS(G) 65). This is to ensure it covers the parts of the occupational safety management system cycle and includes key strategic tasks to ensure that no part of the system is neglected. Tasks which were not completed before the end of the 2021/22 plan have been carried forward into this.

5. FURTHER INFORMATION

5.1 Further information is available from Garry Fisher, Head of Health, Safety and Resilience (01224 272783), garry.fisher@abdn.ac.uk) and from Tracey Slaven, University Secretary & Chief Operating Officer, (1224 272094) tracey.slaven@abdn.ac.uk.

November 2022, **Confidentiality Status:** Open

APPENDIX A - HEALTH AND SAFETY MANAGEMENT PLAN 2021- 2022

	OBJECTIVE /ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	RAG	START	COMPLETION	Progress / Comments
PLAN - POLICY	Continue to progress the agreed prioritised program for the review of all UoA health, safety and wellbeing policy documents.	Head of Health Safety and Wellbeing	G	October 2021	September 2022	Ongoing - Prioritised program amended at H&S Committee meeting in May. Work started on the high priority policies now new staff in post. Carried over to new 3-year plan.
PLAN - ORGANISE	Review of the terms of reference and coverage of the School and Department Safety Committees	Heads of Schools & Directors	A	October 2021	December 2021	Most committees now have terms of reference in place. The H & S Team can provide a generic template to be used by those with no bespoke terms of reference.
	Workload Planning Review Group to meet at the agreed regular intervals and report on progress to the H&S Committee	Senior Vice Principal	NYD	September 2022?	During 2022/23	To include feedback on review of key pinch points in professional services activities. Carried forward to 2022/23.
PLAN -COMMUNICATION	Maintain the structured Health and Safety Committee meeting program, keeping the representation under review, so that it reflects the organisation.	Convenor & Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team	G	October 2020	Ongoing. (4 times per year).	Provisional dates agreed. All meetings took place as planned.
	Maintain a regular programme of communication on health and safety topics including safety alerts and circulation of actions agreed at the H&S Committee.	Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team	G	October 2021	September 2022	Safety alerts ongoing. First "newsletter" type communication issued in late 2021.
	Review, revise and update the Health, Safety and Wellbeing content of StaffNet.	Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team	A	October 2021	September 2022	Ongoing minor updates but more work required to improve the content. Carried over to new 3-year plan.

	OBJECTIVE /ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	RAG	START	COMPLETION	Comments
DO - COMPETENCE	Relaunch and roll out the 3 compulsory health and safety e-learning courses including revised DSE Training and Assessment module for multiple workstations.	Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team	G	November 2021	March 2022	Relaunched on 1st March 2022. (Postponed due to "Omicron" increasing homeworking).
	Provide regular updates to the University Safety Committee on uptake of health and safety training, including e-learning.	Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team & Staff Development	G	October 2021	September 2022	Paper on the agenda for the May 2022 meeting of the H&S Committee onwards – Ongoing.
DO - IMPLEMENTATION	Pilot the academic workload allocation tool and associated guidance in a school.	Human Resources	NYD	TBC	TBC	On hold pending recruitment to the vacant posts in the H, S & W Team. Deferred to 2022/23.
	Implement a new process for provision of Personal, or Generic Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs /GEEPs) for visitors to University controlled buildings, for those who need assistance to evacuate in an emergency situation.	Head of Health Safety and Wellbeing, Fire Safety Adviser, and Disability Co-ordinators	A	January 2022	September 2022	Some generic documents now in use but progress impeded by difficulty recruiting to the Fire Safety Adviser Post. Post now filled. Implement fully in 2022/23.
CHECK - MONITORING	H&S Committee to receive regular reports on accident and incident statistics, including detail on significant incidents and fires.	Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team	G	October 2021	September 2022	Ongoing. Reports to each meeting.
	H&S Committee to receive regular reports on fire safety, including the fire risk assessment review program, Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals, Fire Incidents and any Scottish Fire and Rescue Service audits or enforcement action.	Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team, Fire Safety Adviser	G	October 2021	September 2022	Ongoing. Reports to each meeting.
	H&S Committee to receive regular reports from the Radiation Hazards Sub-Committee and Biosafety Safety Committees.	Convenors of H&S Sub Committees	G	October 2021	September 2022	Ongoing. Reports to each meeting.
	H&S Committee is to receive regular updates on progress against the Wellbeing Strategy, Annual Action plan.	Head of Student Experience	G	February 2022	September 2022	First report at the February meeting. Ongoing. Reports to each meeting.

	OBJECTIVE /ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	RAG	START	COMPLETION	Comments
CHECK - AUDITING	Implement the new H & S Audit Strategy as agreed in August 2021.	Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team	A	January 2022	September 2022	On hold pending recruitment to the vacant posts in the H, S & W Team. Carried forward to 2022/23.
CHECK - AUDITING	Internal Audit of the University of Aberdeen's Health, Safety and Wellbeing arrangements	Internal Audit and Head of H, S & Wellbeing.	**NYD**	TBC	TBC	None scheduled this academic year.
ACT - REVIEW	Draft Health and Safety Management Plan for 2022 / 2023 and beyond.	Head of Health Safety and Wellbeing	G	August 2022	September 2022	First draft of a 3-year plan to be considered by the H&S Committee in August 2022.
ACT - REVIEW	Review the provision of specialist advisory services, informed by the health and safety audits and Schools/Directorate Risk Registers.	Head of Health Safety and Wellbeing	G	January 2022	September 2022	Report discussed and approach agreed at the August H&S Committee meeting.
ADDITIONAL (Unplanned)						
ADDITIONAL (Unplanned)						

Key		Completed or on track for completion.		Started, off track for completion, but being managed.		Off track, attention required.	**NYD**	Not Yet Due

APPENDIX B – SIMPLE ACCIDENT AND INCIDENT REPORTING DATA AND COVID REATED SICKNESS ABSENCE STATISTICS 2021- 2022

The following is a simple summary of accident and incident statistics by major category.

Note: Accidents and incidents for both years are both lower than pre-Covid years and near misses would be expected to be higher than accidents.

Academic Year	Accidents	Near Misses	RIDDOR Reportable
2020-21	50	65	3
2021-22	105	60	0

Accidents = An event which results in injury or ill-health

Near Miss = An event not causing harm, but which had the potential to cause injury or ill-health

RIDDOR = Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations

Below are Covid, lost days statistics.

Note: The grey area in the table below shows the period from when lateral flow tests were made available to the public in Scotland for asymptomatic testing (from 26th April 2021) until provision stopped and the availability of testing kits was reduced, from 30th April 2022 onwards.

Date	Number of Days Lost		
	Covid Long Term	Covid Short Term	Reaction to Vaccine
Jan-21	0	4	0
Feb-21	28	21	2
Mar-21	57	48	53
Apr-21	60	0	15
May-21	62	4	49
Jun-21	58	42	29
Jul-21	31	110	75
Aug-21	54	44	39
Sep-21	90	165	39
Oct-21	115	134	65
Nov-21	81	138	22
Dec-21	113	148	55
Jan-22	115	296	12
Feb-22	135	480	3
Mar-22	159	824	1
Apr-22	204	336	1
May-22	188	160	5
Jun-22	157	494	0
Jul-22	238	468	0
Aug-22	154	132	0

Sickness Absence
Total Days Lost to Covid
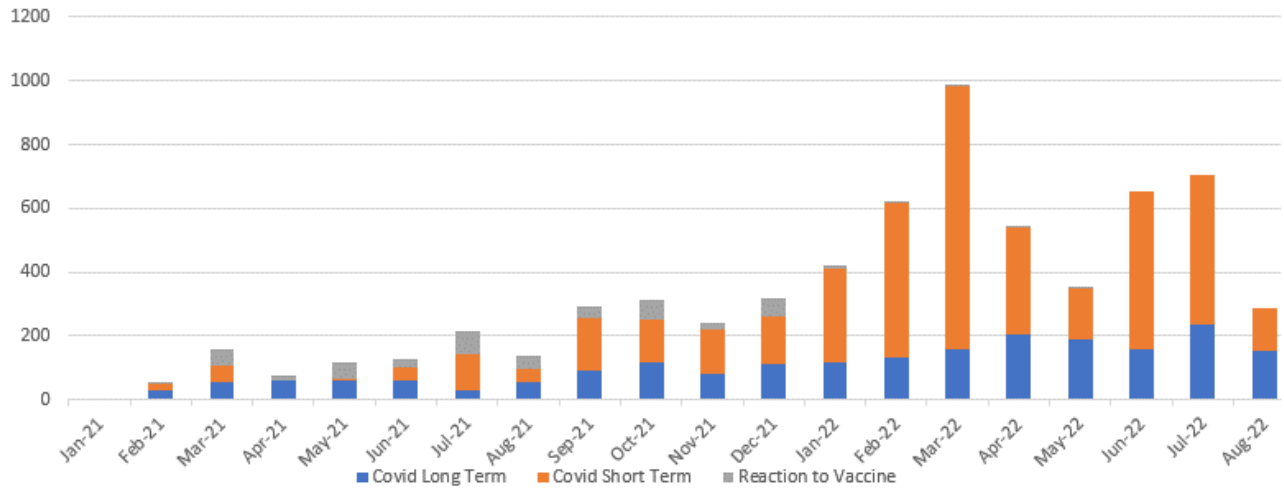
Legend: Covid Long Term, Covid Short Term, Reaction to Vaccine

Sickness Absence
Total Days Lost to Covid

Legend: Number of Days Lost Covid Long Term, Number of Days Lost Covid Short Term, Number of Days Lost Reaction to Vaccine

22 November 2022
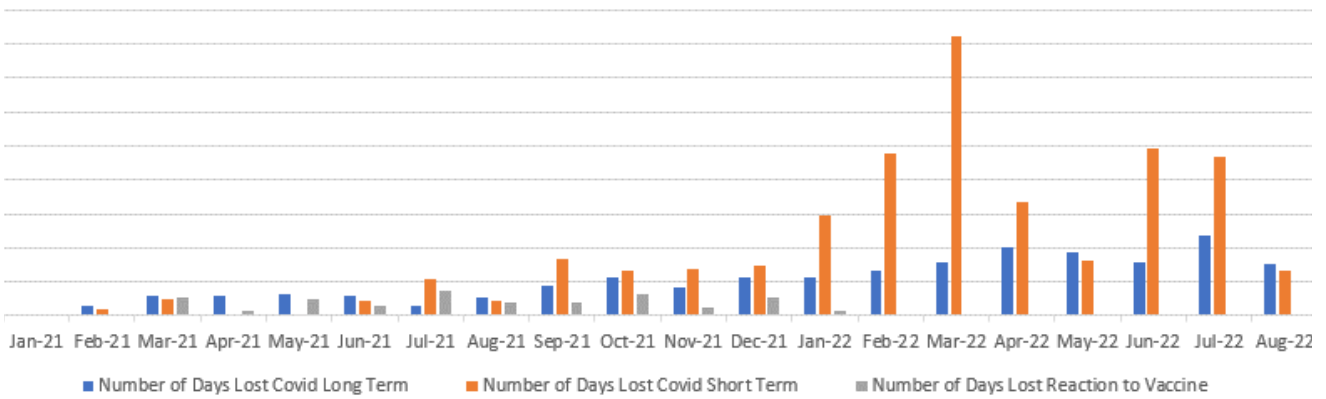
UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

REPORT FROM SENATUS ACADEMICUS

1.   PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

1.1   This is a paper outlines the main items of business considered by the Senate at its meeting on 2 November 2022.

1.2   This paper is provided for information and approval and forms part of the mechanism for Court to assure itself that it has academic oversight of quality within the University.

2.   RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1   Court is asked to **note** the items discussed (3.1 - 3.6), which included outcomes from the Promotions Review and the Workload Review, a new Research Publications Policy and arrangements for academic year 2023/24. Court is asked to **approve**, the draft Resolution, 'Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Non-Academic) included at 3.4.3

3.   DISCUSSION

3.1   PROMOTIONS REVIEW

For its part, Senate endorsed the proposals made by the Academic Promotion Review Working Group together with the proposed final versions of the Academic Promotion Policy and Procedure, including the Framework of Criteria and associated details.

3.2   WORKLOAD REVIEW FINAL REPORT

Senate considered and approved the final Workload Planning Review Group report which detailed recommendations for the future direction of workload planning for the University, as well as the next steps required for implementation of the new process.

3.3   ITEMS FROM THE RESEARCH POLICY COMMITTEE

3.3.1 Institutional Policy on the Responsible Use of Metrics
Senate discussed the background and context to the proposed draft policy on the *Responsible Use of Metrics*. Senate noted the policy is required as part of the University's commitments as a signatory to the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA). A final version of the policy will be considered at a future meeting of Senate.

3.3.2 Implementation of the Concordat for Researcher Development
Senate considered an update on the implementation of the University's commitment to the UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. Senate discussed a series of high-level recommendations identified by the Researcher Development Concordat Steering Group.

3.3.3 Research Publication Policy
Following discussions at the meeting in September, Senate approved an updated version of the *Research Publications Policy.*

3.4   ITEMS FROM THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

3.4.1 Decolonising the Curriculum
Senate discussed the approach and timeline proposed for the work to be undertaken within schools to 'decolonise' the curriculum.

3.4.2 Academic Year Arrangements 2023/24

Senate approved the proposed academic year arrangements for 2023/24. Work is continuing to develop proposals for the future structure of the academic year to be implemented from 2024/25.

3.4.3 UEC Report to Senate

As part of its consideration of the routine report from the University Education Committee, Senate approved a replacement *Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Non-Academic).* Accordingly, the Court is asked **to approve, on the recommendation of the Senate, the draft Resolution, 'Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Non-Academic)'** appended as Annex A.

This new version of the non-academic discipline regulations was created, following extensive consultation, at the request of the Student Support and Experience Committee. Having not been updated since 2012, the current Code is out of touch with many developments in both operational practice and specific areas of misconduct that now represent a regular part of the work in relation to maintaining good student conduct and managing poor conduct.

Once approved, the implementation of the new Code will be accompanied by a communication plan focused on the positive behaviours expected from students, and linked documents for survivor/victims of Gender Based Violence and the perpetrators of misconduct. It is intended to produce several student-facing documents to clarify the Code and its operation in clear, student-focused, language prior to its launch. The new Code is expected to be fully operational for the 2023/24 Academic Year and will form part of the registration process undertaken by new and returning students from August 2023.

Senate also noted the timeline for the QAA Scotland **Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) visit that will take place at the University on Tuesday 14 February 2023**. QESR is the new external institutional review method developed as part of a major Scottish Funding Council (SFC) review and follows on from the previous Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR) processes.

3.5 GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS TRAVEL

Senate, for its part, endorsed the recommendation that the Guiding Principles of Sustainable Business Travel and Travel Hierarchy be implemented within the University.

3.6 ROUTINE BUSINESS

Senate noted: the University Research Committee Report; the Quality Assurance Committee Report; the timeline for the forthcoming Senate Elections and the outcome of the recent election for a Senate Assessor.

4 FURTHER INFORMATION

4.1 Further information is available from Tracey Slaven (tracey.slaven@abdn.ac.uk) or Rachael Bernard (r.bernard@abdn.ac.uk)

7 November 2022 [version 1]
Confidentiality Status: Open

Resolution No XXX of 2022

CODE OF PRACTICE ON STUDENT DISCIPLINE (NON-ACADEMIC)

After consultation with the Senatus Academicus, the University Court of the University of Aberdeen, at its meeting on DATE, passed the following Resolution:

1.   Resolution No 212 of 2012, Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Non-Academic), of the University Court is hereby revoked.

2.   The procedures to be followed in the exercise of the University's powers regarding student discipline in non-academic matters shall be as set out below.

3.   This Resolution shall come into force on the date on which it is passed by the University Court.

CODE OF PRACTICE ON STUDENT DISCIPLINE (NON-ACADEMIC)

1. OVERRIDING PRINCIPLES

1.1.   The University of Aberdeen is a community that is dedicated to the advancement and dissemination of knowledge through research and education. We want to foster a safe and inclusive environment for learning and working and we are committed to having a fair and transparent process for all parties when resolving issues that may arise. These objectives can only be achieved if all members of the University community can live and work beside each other in conditions of safety and security. We expect all members of our community to behave in a positive and inclusive manner and respect the rights of others.

1.2.   All our students (regardless of their programme of study, level, or location) are expected to uphold the values of the University and to represent the University as positive ambassadors. We expect them to treat others with respect, demonstrate positive behaviours, and to adhere to all relevant regulations and policies. In the event of a student not doing so, we expect them to take responsibility for any misconduct identified and reflect on their behaviours and actions.

1.3.   This Code of Practice on Student Discipline (non-academic) (called throughout this document the **Code**) outlines examples of what constitutes student misconduct; the process through which reports of misconduct by students will be considered; and the possible outcomes that may be applied where reports of misconduct are upheld.

1.4.   Throughout the Code and its supporting documents reference is made to behaviours, some of which may also constitute possible criminal behaviours, including gender-based-violence, assault, harassment, and bullying. Anyone impacted by such behaviour can find details of the support available to them on our website - www.abdn.ac.uk/students/support and may wish to seek support in advance of reading this document to understand how they can be supported in relation to misconduct they have experienced. To find more information on the support available, or to discuss the Code, please email student.support@abdn.ac.uk.

1.5.   A fundamental principle when applying the Code is to educate students who have been reported for alleged misconduct, to encourage positive future behaviours and, where appropriate, offer the opportunity to learn from mistakes they have made to avoid repeating them in the future.

1.6.   While applying the Code, consideration will be given to other processes that the reported party may be required to undertake (such as Fitness to Practice processes (or similarly named processes at a School level) for students subject to these requirements). In cases where other processes may apply, and there is no clear approach for which would take priority, it will be for a Review Panel (Defined below) to decide the most appropriate process to commence. In some cases, multiple processes may be required, and we will normally prioritise completing one before commencing another.

1.7.   In the Code we refer to the University Community to mean anyone who, at the point in question, was actively engaging in a direct connection to the University, including applicants; students; staff members; agents; partners; or alumni.

1.8.   Throughout the Code, reference is made to staff roles/departments and terms which may change in name or structure from time to time. Where this is the case, we will read the Code to mean the person or entity who mirrors the function or role within the University at the time.

1.9.   The "burden of proof" applied to cases of misconduct is the "balance of probabilities". The balance of probabilities means that the University can decide if it believes, following its investigation, that something is more likely to have happened than not. Where misconduct is found, there is no expectation that behaviour is proven beyond doubt, but rather that it is reasonable to believe, based on the information we have, that it is more likely to have taken place than not.

2. WHO IS INVOLVED IN CASES OF POSSIBLE MISCONDUCT?

2.1.   Several people can be involved in the process of reviewing and investigating a case of possible misconduct. The below terms are used in the Code to describe the various people and groups that can be involved:

- *The reporting party*: a person who alerted the University to the behaviour and may or may not be directly impacted by it.
- *The reported party*: the individual who has been reported as having conducted the alleged behaviour under review.
- *An impacted party*: an individual who may, or may not, have reported the behaviour but who was directly impacted by it.
- *A case manager*: a member of staff who will oversee the administration of the report from start to finish. They will coordinate the communication with parties, arrangement of investigations and Review Panel, and generally guide those involved in the process.
- *A witness*: an individual who may or may not be directly impacted by the behaviour but can provide information during a review or investigation.
- *The Investigator*: a member of staff appointed to investigate the behaviour and determine if misconduct has occurred. An investigator will be selected by the Case Manager from the list of possible investigators (Annex B).
- *The Review Panel*: the group who will hear appeals of decisions not to progress a case to the investigation stage; referrals from an investigator of cases where a possible impact on student registration is made; make decisions on the appropriate process to apply in a case were multiple policies may operate; and appeals from reporting parties. The panel will be made up of three members (including at least one Student Member) who have not been involved in the case before. Eligible members are shown in Annex A.
- *Supporters*: during any meeting conducted under the Code, anyone asked to attend may be accompanied by a single supporter. This supporter can be an AUSA representative, any member of University staff supporting the individual, or another currently registered University of Aberdeen student, if they are not involved in the case in another capacity.

3. WHAT IS MISCONDUCT

3.1.   Misconduct can take many forms and its definition may evolve over time. It is not possible to provide a complete list of possible misconduct here and we have given some examples below.

3.2.   Whether behaviour constitutes misconduct will be a decision for the Case Manager or, if required, a Review Panel. When deciding if behaviour could amount to misconduct under the Code the test applied will be to ask would such behaviour be reasonably investigated by another University.

3.3.   Some examples of misconduct that come under this Code are below (this list is not exhaustive):

- Behaving in a violent, indecent, or threatening manner against any member of the University community.
- Carrying of an offensive weapon on University premises.
- Sexual violence or sexual harassment of any member of the University community. We refer to sexual violence or harassment as any sexually motivated act or activity that is unwanted by the person to whom it is directed and can be emotional or physical in nature, including coercive control.
- Harassing, bullying, or intimidating any member of the University community, or groups within our community. In this Code harassment, bullying or intimidating behaviour means any behaviour (including use of offensive language, "hate speech" or gestures) which would be regarded as such by any reasonable person. Harassment and bullying can be general and/or targeted against a specific background (such as colour, race, nationality, national origins, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, family circumstances, political beliefs, gender, gender reassignment, trade union membership or age) or any other unfair distinction. Harassment can also include any

repeated, unsolicited, contact in any medium and may also include coercive control.

- Engaging in any behaviour which relates to a serious criminal offence or activity that may bring the University into disrepute.
- Anti-social behaviour, including but not limited to excessive noise, littering on campus, or throwing items from windows on University premises.
- Inappropriate forms of communication or engagement on a University online platform (including social media and learning platforms).
- Inappropriate forms of communication and engagement in any group, social channel or other communications method used, or accessible, by members of our community that is focused on the University community or groups of its members.
- Misusing, intentionally or recklessly damaging, and unauthorised use of premises or items of property (including theft) owned by the University or a member of its community, including the misuse of computer or IT equipment.
- Infringement of copyright when copying or downloading published information.
- Engaging in deception or other forms of dishonesty in relation to the University or a member of its community.
- Behaving in a way which causes, or would be likely to cause, injury to any person or to impair safety. Examples will include the refusal to leave a building during a fire alarm, tampering with fire alarms, fire extinguishers, or any other fire safety device, refusing to follow the instructions of demonstrators in labs, and carrying out unauthorised experiments on University premises.
- Deliberately doing, or failing to do, anything which causes the University to breach a statutory obligation or law.
- Failing to follow a no contact requirement made under the Code, during the progression of an investigation or as a formal outcome of a case where misconduct is found.
- Failing to comply with any outcome under the Code.

4. WHEN DOES THE CODE APPLY?

4.1. The Code will only apply to alleged misconduct that is non-academic in nature and is not otherwise dealt with in the separate Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic). Academic misconduct relates to conduct directly linked to assessments and academic work.

4.2. The University may consider an allegation of misconduct under the Code, provided that the behaviour in question meets at least one of the following criteria:

1   it takes place on a University premises; or
2   is committed by a student engaged on a University activity; or
3   it targets, or impacts directly, member(s) of the University community; or
4   it relates to a serious criminal offence or activity that may bring the University into disrepute.

Whether behaviour falls under the remit of the Code will be a decision for a Case Manager or, if required, a Review Panel.

4.3. Behaviour will normally only be considered within the remit of the Code where it takes place while the reported individual is a registered student (including associate students), or while the student is actively engaging with the University with a view to become a registered student (for example while under the application process or while engaging in a university activity).

4.4. We will only regard behaviour that takes place during a break from study or after an individual graduates if the individual later seeks to register again with the University (as a new student on a new programme or to complete an existing programme) as coming within the scope of the Code. In such cases an investigation under the Code will need to be concluded before an individual is eligible to register again. Any delay in registration due to the need to investigate under the Code will not be a cause of appeal by the individual.

4.5. In cases where behaviour comes to the attention of the University after an individual has left the

University (through graduation, completion or otherwise) we will not be able to take any action under the Code unless the individual seeks registration again in the future.

4.6. Individuals staying in University accommodation owned or controlled by the University (as a potential applicant, pending registration or during a break from study) will still be subject to the terms of the Code. In some cases, behaviour may also constitute a breach of the accommodation contract. It will be for staff in University accommodation to decide whether a case is referred under the Code or can be actioned under their contract.

4.7. The University can only investigate behaviours where we have relevant information to do so effectively. Information could be provided through written statements; the ability of an investigator to speak with impacted parties; documents and photographs/videos/other media showing the behaviour or impact; or information provided by others who witnessed the behaviour or its impact.

4.8. Students who are undertaking a period of study at another location (including those on formal study abroad periods; work placements; internships, for example) will still be covered by the Code. It is likely they will also be subject to local rules in place at their host organisation. Where this is the case, the University reserve the right to extend the Code to include members of the host organisation as if they were a member of the University Community when determining whether to apply the Code.

4.9. Some behaviours may overlap with the processes of Aberdeen University Students' Association (**AUSA**), and it may be more appropriate for such behaviours to be exclusively investigated by the University or AUSA. In some cases, a joint approach will be beneficial and a decision on which approach to apply will be decided by the Case Manager with input from AUSA.

4.10. Some students will be covered by additional rules around their conduct, including those who are subject to Fitness to Practice processes at School level. It is possible that misconduct may be considered under both such processes, but this does not mean that the same outcome will be reached.

5. MISCONDUCT THAT MAY ALSO BE A CRIMINAL OFFENCE

5.1. The University reserve the right to apply the Code to any student who has engaged in a serious criminal offence, regardless of where or against whom it has been committed. Whether a crime is serious will be a decision for a Case Manager or the Review Panel.

5.2. Where criminal behaviour is identified and it is targeted against University property, the University may seek to report this to the Police. Where the behaviour is targeted against a member of the University community, we will always support their decision to make a report to the Police but will never do this without their express consent – unless not doing so may put others at risk or make us breach our duty of care. We will take this approach regardless of the jurisdiction in which the misconduct occurs.

5.3. Regardless of any ongoing Police or Criminal Justice process, the University's default position will be to apply the Code regardless of the stage such processes have reached. Only in cases where we have a strong belief that doing so may prejudice such processes will action under the Code be postponed until an outcome is made in the justice system. This will usually be due to direct input from the Police or Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service.

5.4. In some situations, we may apply an interim outcome, pending the final decision being made following an investigation under the Code. This may be to allow additional information through the Criminal Justice process to be made available, especially in cases where we have limited access to information to make an appropriate decision (this may be particularly the case where it is important that forensic or other evidence is assessed, and the University is unable to do so through its internal processes). It may also be required to allow the University to effectively manage risk.

5.5.   The processes outlined in this Code may be used to investigate any individuals that have been charged with a significant criminal offence, or are subject to any unspent conviction, which has occurred before their registration at the University at the point this is disclosed to us (or we become aware of this). This section of the Code will be read in conjunction with any policy related to admission and registration and can apply to applicants, offer holders and registered students.

5.6.   For the avoidance of doubt, the University will come to a decision on the application of the Code independent of the outcome of any Criminal Justice process. The finding of guilt in the Criminal Justice process will not necessarily mean that misconduct is found, and vice-versa. It is not the role of the University to investigate crimes, or an alleged criminal offence, and our role is restricted to the investigation of potential misconduct under the Code.

5.7.   Students are required to let the University know about any charges they receive during their period of study with us by contacting student.support@abdn.ac.uk so an assessment of risk can be completed.

5.8.   Students who have been victim of a crime can seek support from our Student Support team regardless of the nature, or perpetrator, of the crime. You can email the team on student.support@abdn.ac.uk to seek support.

6.   REPORTING MISCONDUCT

6.1.   Reports of misconduct can come from various sources. Sometimes support may be sought from a staff member about an incident that has occurred, but to ensure it is formally recorded as alleged misconduct it must be reported using one of the methods below.

6.2.   We use the word reported throughout the Code, though behaviour may come to the attention of the University without a named reporter.

6.3.   Anyone wishing to make the University aware of potential student misconduct can do this in one of the following ways:

- Directly to a member of staff in our Student Advice & Support Team.
- By emailing student.support@abdn.ac.uk with details of the report or to request to meet a member of the team.
- By using our Online Reporting Tool.

6.4.   When alleged misconduct is reported, we will keep the reporter updated on the process throughout. This may also include providing updates through a member of relevant support staff.

6.5.   During the progression of a case under the Code, parties will usually be asked not to contact others, especially any impacted party. This may be restricted to discussing the case with certain people or outlined more widely resulting in a total requirement not to make contact for the time the case is being progressed under the Code. Failing to follow such requirements will be regarded as an act of misconduct itself.

7.   WHO WILL BE TOLD ABOUT CASES OF MISCONDUCT AND THEIR OUTCOMES?

7.1.   It will be the decision of the Investigator, or convener of a Review Panel, to decide which individuals need to be involved to come to a decision on whether misconduct has taken place. To have these conversations and exchanges it will be necessary to share details of the report that has been made and against whom it has been made.

7.2.   During any Investigation or Review Panel, notes of meetings and any information that has been collected which forms part of the decision-making process will normally be shared with the reported party. Where notes of meetings are made these will be shared with the individual involved to confirm

their accuracy before they are distributed.

7.3. The only exception to 7.2 will be where information is raised that may prejudice a criminal process. In cases which may not be able to proceed without the use of this information, the process will automatically be referred to a Review Panel for their consideration. The Panel will be given the information in question and will be able to decide if the case can be concluded without the information at question. Where this is not possible, an interim outcome may be issued to manage risk in advance of the formal outcome of the criminal justice process.

7.4. Where a reporting party, or impacted party, are involved in a case they will be entitled to know the outcome of the Investigation or Review Panel, including details of any formal outcome levied. These will normally be communicated shortly after the appeal period has ended.

7.5. Formal outcome letters will be copied to the Head of the relevant School(s) in which the reported party studies and any other staff member that needs to support the outcomes put in place.

7.6. For cases that interplay with other processes, including Fitness to Practice and cases that involve AUSA, the appropriate School lead/AUSA CEO will be informed of the situation as it progresses through the Code. Outcomes will then be shared with them to inform any subsequent processes that need to be followed. We will share information, and documents, that form part of any of the steps in the Code to ensure consistency of information across these separate processes. Such information can then be used by the staff investigating the Fitness to Practice processes/linked AUSA processes, as they see fit.

8. PROCEDURE IN CASES OF REPORTED MISCONDUCT

8.1. Alleged misconduct can progress through four possible stages:

- Initial Review;
- Investigation;
- Review Panel; and
- Appeal.

8.2. **Initial Review**

1   The Initial Review will consider the reported behaviour and establish if it falls under the Code. It is possible that a case will not progress past this stage where it does not meet the requirements of the Code.

2   It is possible that a referral to an alternative, or additional, process may be made at this stage, including to our Complaints Handling Process; Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic); Fitness to Practice Processes; AUSA processes; or our Support for Study process, amongst others.

3   The Initial Review will be conducted by the Case Manager and an outcome as to whether the Code applies will be reached by them, in conjunction with a Review Panel where required.

4   The decision of the Case Manager can be appealed to a Review Panel (and if one was used in reaching the initial decision, a new panel will be convened to hear the appeal by circulation).

5   The Initial Review will normally be concluded within 5 workings days of the case being raised with a Case Manager.

6   The Case Manager will also consider any risk or safety issues during their review and will liaise with senior staff in Student Support should they believe that a formal risk assessment is needed or any emergency action under the Code may be required.

7   It may also be required that parties be instructed to limit their interaction with other individuals as part of this review, especially if input from a reported party is required. If such requirement is ignored by a student, this will be a form of misconduct itself.

8   Where a case has been put forward by a reporting individual, they will be entitled to know the outcome of the Initial Review and receive confirmation about whether a case is being progressed to investigation or not. They will also be offered the opportunity to appeal the decision to a Review Panel.

8.3.   Investigation

1   Where an Initial Review identifies that a case falls under the Code, an Investigation will be carried out by an Investigator. The purpose of the investigation is to establish the facts of what has happened; collect information relating to the situation; and to speak with any parties the Investigator feels appropriate to conclude their investigation.

2   The Investigation will be conducted as informally as possible and will normally be concluded within 10 workings days of the initial referral from a Case Manager.

3   In arranging meetings during an Investigation, it is possible for the Investigator to invite a notetaker to support the meeting. Anyone being met with under this process can bring a supporter as outlined in Section 2. Support can be sought throughout these processes from Student Support (student.support@abdn.ac.uk) and AUSA (ausaadvice@abdn.ac.uk) and students will be signposted to these support services in correspondence issued about the investigation.

4   Following the conclusion of their investigation, the Investigator may:

- Dismiss the report of misconduct and close the case.
- Decide that, although misconduct is likely to have occurred, the matter has now been resolved through actions taken by the reported party since the alleged behaviour took place. Usually, any impacted party will directly input to this outcome.
- Decide that misconduct did occur (especially if the reported party admits this during the process) and recommend an outcome to the reported party (Annex C). Where the reported party accepts this outcome, the case will be completed. Where the reported party does not accept this outcome, the case will be referred to a Review Panel.
- In cases where the Investigator believes that an outcome that interrupts the reported party's student registration is required (including suspension, or exclusion of more than 1 month, and expulsion) the Investigator must refer the case to a Review Panel for ratification of the outcome.

8.4.   Review Panel – General Points

1   Where a Review Panel is required, this shall be arranged as soon as possible and normally within 10 working days of it being requested by an Investigator.

2   At least 72 hours before the Review Panel, the reported party will be given a copy of the papers that will be provided to the Panel, including the formal outcome from the Investigation, together with any documents that were reviewed and formed part of the outcome.

3   The reported party will be able to submit a written statement to the Panel in advance of the review meeting, though this must be provided at least 24 hours before the Panel convenes.

4   The University will not provide legal or other representation for any party involved in the proceedings brought under this Code.

5   Review Panels will be convened by an appropriate member of the Disciplinary Investigation Group who will always be supported by two other panel members, one of whom will be a student representative. In addition, staff members will be present to clerk the hearings and support the Panel as required by the Convener. Details on Panel membership, and the Convener, is in Annex A. Consideration to diversity of the panel will be given when selecting members, and we will ensure a gender balance on all Panels.

6   Panels can be conducted in person or virtually and will be designed to maximise the ability for parties to engage.

7   Panel membership will be shared with all parties attending the Review meeting in advance, including any additional parties that are asked to attend at the discretion of the Convener. Requests for witnesses and reporting/impacted parties to attend can be made by any member of the Panel, the Investigator, and the reported party but it will be for the Convener to decide if it is suitable for them to attend.

8   Where an impacted party or witness is not able to attend a Review Panel the Convener may consider an alternative method of getting their input. This could be through a meeting at an alternative time with the Panel or the provision of a written statement.

9   Following the Review Panel, the Panel will consider the information and reach a decision, including the appropriate outcome. The decision will be communicated to the reported party in writing, normally within 5 working days. After the appeal period has ended, and any appeal has been concluded, information will then be shared with other parties as outlined in Section 7.

8.5.   Review Panel – On the Day

1   The Convener will introduce the parties present and provide an overview of the procedures below. Initially the Panel members, a clerk, the reported party, and the investigator can be present at the Panel.

2   The Convener will invite the Investigator to make an opening statement outlining the conclusion of their investigation. This statement will include reference to the information they collected as part of their investigation, which will have been provided to the Panel and reported party in advance of the meeting. The Panel may ask questions of the Investigator following their statement through the Convener.

3   The Convener will then clarify the precise allegation of non-academic misconduct under investigation to all parties. At this point the Convener will invite the reported party to state whether they admit or deny the case of misconduct put forward by the investigator.

4   The Convener will invite the reported party to make a statement. The Panel may ask questions of the reported party following their statement and the reported party may also ask questions of the Investigator at this time. Questions will always be addressed through the Convener.

5   Any input required from witnesses or reporting/impacted parties will be sought directly by the Panel and, depending on the case, may not include the presence of the reported party. This decision will rest with the Convener. Where a case of misconduct involves alleged sexual or personal violence, an impacted party will not be expected to share space with the reported party.

6   There will be a chance for all parties to ask final questions and seek clarifications on any

matters with the reported party or Investigator.

7   The reported party will be invited to give a concluding statement at which point there will be no further opportunity to ask or respond to questions, or to provide additional information.

8   The Convener will conclude the hearing by outlining any next steps that the Panel need to take (which may include meeting separately with other parties) and will tell the reported party the expected timeframe for an outcome to be issued. Details of possible outcomes are contained in Annex C.

9.   APPEALING A DECISION

9.1.   A reported party can appeal against the decision of a Case Manager; Investigator or Review Panel, but only if there are valid *grounds to appeal.* The possible grounds for appeal, which must be evidenced when making an appeal, are:

- the University's procedures were not followed (without the reported parties' prior approval); or
- the person or body making the decision did not have the authority to do so; or
- the person or body making the decision did not act impartially; or
- the penalty imposed was unreasonable, that is, that it is one which no reasonable person, properly advised, would have imposed under this Code.

9.2.   An appeal against a decision of the Case Manager or Investigator should be made in writing to the Case Manager within 10 working days of the decision taking place. The Case Manager will pass the appeal to a Review Panel for consideration.

9.3.   An appeal against the decision of a Review Panel must be made in accordance with the prevailing University appeal process available on the University Website. This process is managed by our Academic Services team.

9.4.   When an appeal is received by Registry, a Case Officer for the appeal will be appointed and receipt of the appeal will be acknowledged.

9.5.   On receipt of the appeal, a Grounds to Proceed panel, composed of the Case Officer and two senior academic or administrative staff members (depending on the nature of the case), will review the case to determine whether there are grounds for the appeal to proceed.

9.6.   If the appeal is deemed not to contain grounds to proceed, the appellant will be advised of this outcome within 5 working days of receipt of the appeal. The appellant will be informed of his or her right to seek independent review of the University's decision by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

9.7.   If the Grounds to Proceed Panel consider that the appeal should proceed, the original Investigator/Panel will be asked whether they wish to review their decision. If they do not wish to amend the original decision taken, the matter is to be referred to an Appeal Panel, in accordance with the University's Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals. The people who form the Appeal will not be the same as those involved in the original decision.

10.   MANAGING CASES INVOLVING RISK OR URGENCY

10.1   In cases of urgency, usually determined following an assessment of risk and recommendation from a senior member of staff in Student Support Services, the Principal (or in their absence the Senior Vice-Principal or University Secretary) shall have the power to authorise immediate action to temporarily exclude or suspend the reported party from accessing campus locations (including University accommodation) or to limit their ability to remain a registered student. These powers will only be

applied where the Principal believes this action is necessary to protect members of the University community (including a reporting or reported party or impacted party) or members of the public in general.

10.2   Cases where such a request may be made to the Principal will include:

- Where bail conditions levied by a law enforcement agency restrict access to campus locations (even if this is restricted to a local area, we may consider expanding this to include the whole campus);
- Where bail conditions levied by a law enforcement agency require that a reported party does not contact another member of our community; or
- Where a risk assessment has established that the reported party's presence on campus causes, or could likely cause, harm to members of the University community (either specific individuals or wider groups) including the reported party

10.3   Reasons for the decision shall be communicated in writing, usually by email, to the reported party.

10.4   In cases where such exclusion is required, the case will immediately progress to the Investigation Stage of the Code. In the first instance the exclusion, or suspension, will normally be for a period of 10 working days to allow the Investigation to conclude. A request for an extension to this period may be made to the Principal if this is needed to conclude the investigation, or if the case needs to progress to a Review Panel.

10.5   During any period of temporary suspension or exclusion, all reasonable efforts will be taken to minimise any academic disadvantage to the reported party (e.g., provision of lecture notes, sitting exams away from the main examination locations etc.) and ensure as quick a resolution as practicable.

Annex A: Possible Members of a Review Panel

A.1   **Staff Member or Convener:**
Any Vice Principal, normally the Vice Principal for Education.

A.2   **Staff Member:**
Any Head of School
Any staff member of Senate
Any member of School or Professional Services staff at Grade 9

A.3   **Student Member:**
The AUSA Student President or a nominee of their choosing (who is a member of AUSA).

Annex B: List of Possible Investigators

B.1   In most cases, Investigations will be carried out by a member of staff in the School to which the reported party belongs, appointed by the Head of School. Where alleged misconduct takes place in University accommodation, this will normally be conducted by a member of staff in working within the accommodation environment.

B.2   Any member of University staff at Grade 6 or above can investigate allegations of misconduct if the allegations do not involve violence; sexual harassment; or sexual violence.

B.3   A member of University staff at Grade 8 or above can investigate any case of misconduct.

Annex C: Possible Outcomes following an Investigation or Review Panel

C.1   Following an Investigation or Review Panel, which finds that misconduct has occurred, the Investigator may apply one or more of the penalties noted below. In all cases a formal recording that misconduct took place will be made on the reported party's record for the duration of their programme of study. We will also issue an outcome letter with a formal warning about the behaviour and, at a minimum, recommendations for avoiding such incidents in the future.

C.2   For a repeated instance of similar misconduct it is usual for higher penalties to be levied, which may involve interruption to a reported party's student status.

C.3   Where a recommendation to interrupt a reported party's student status is made, this will be automatically referred to a Review Panel for review and confirmation. The Review Panel will have the power to authorise any recommended outcome referred to them or decide that an alternative, or additional, outcome is required.

C.4   This section outlines different outcomes that can be issued following a finding of misconduct. In some cases, the Review Panel may suggest an alternative outcome which is not noted below. In such cases the reported party will be asked to accept this alternative outcome, which in most cases will be a less severe version of a listed penalty.

C.5   Where a reported party fails to take the steps required by their outcome, the case will be referred to a Review Panel (ideally the same composition of the original Panel) for consideration on next steps.

C.6   A Review Panel can always decide to change a recommended outcome and their decision is final as to the ultimate outcome issued.

C.7   An Investigator or Review Panel may decide that more information is needed before they can reach an ultimate decision or outcome. Normally this will be the need to await the outcome from a Criminal Justice Process. In such cases it will be possible for an Investigator to recommend, or a Review Panel to

apply, interim outcomes for a set period. This will normally include suspension of study and a requirement not to contact named parties in the case until a decision can be made. At the point an ultimate decision can be reached the Review Panel will reconvene (with alternative panel members if needed) to consider an outcome. It will be for the Convener to decide what, if any, additional input is needed from parties to the case and the format such input will take.

C.8   Where a student must pay costs because of an outcome being applied this will be the responsibility of the student. This also applies to any costs they incur in a return to study following a suspension or period away from campus. Costs may include, but aren't limited to, travel, visas, and accommodation costs.

C.9   Possible Outcomes:

- Reflect on their behaviour and to write a reflective letter or essay summarising their behaviour and the steps they will take to ensure it will not happen again. Approaches could take the form of an apology letter or general essay. Such work should be appropriate with the misconduct in question and will need to be deemed acceptable to the Investigator;
- Make payments to cover the cost of any damage made to property, or fees incurred by the University, because of their misconduct;
- Make a payment to another party where they have directly suffered loss as result of the Reported Party's action, and this can be clearly evidenced (for example damage to property);
- Undertake a training course or programme linked to the behaviours at question. Where this carries a cost, these will be met by the University. A period will be set by which completion of the training must be evidenced, normally not exceeding two months;
- A temporary exclusion from access to elements of University locations, activities or services for a period lasting no longer than 1 month;
- If staying within University accommodation, require the reported party to move rooms, or buildings, where this is required to support the wellbeing of flatmates/other residents;
- If staying in University accommodation, confirm that a fee may be payable (as outlined locally) for certain behaviours;
- In the academic environment, require the reported party to change arrangements to ensure they are not interacting with named individuals (this could apply for a single course, or at a Programme level, for a fixed period or the duration of the programme);
- Instruct the reported party to cease contact with another named individual, individuals, or group of people, or to direct their contact through a particular method;
- Put in place a requirement to engage in a community service activity to benefit the wider University community;
- Ask that a Review Panel be convened with the recommendation that the reported party be excluded from access to elements of the University locations, activities, or services for a period longer than one month;
- Ask that that a Review Panel be convened with the recommendation that the reported party be suspended from study for a reasonable period, normally up to 12 months. Approval from the Principal (or their nominee) can be sought where the Review Panel authorises a period that exceeds 12 months.
- Ask that a Review Panel be convened with the recommendation that the reported party be expelled from study due to the severity of their conduct. Approval from the Principal (or their nominee) will be needed for all expulsions from study;
- For cases within University accommodation, an exclusion can be recommended to apply only to their ability to reside in their accommodation. In such cases a Panel will not normally be required to ratify this outcome, and this will be actioned using the accommodation contract.

Annex D - Definition of expulsion, suspension, or exclusion

D.1   **Expulsion** is the termination of matriculated student status involving a total prohibition on attendance at, or access to, the University and on any participation in University activities. A student who has been expelled will not normally be eligible for re-admittance to the University. All requests for re-admittance following expulsion must be approved by the Senior Management Team.

D.2   **Suspension** of matriculated student status involves a total prohibition on attendance at or access to the University and on any participation in University activities; but it may be subject to qualification, such as permission to attend for the purpose of an examination. Suspension will be used where exclusion from specified activities or facilities is considered to be inadequate.

D.3   **Exclusion** involves selective restriction on attendance at or access to the University or any of its services, locations, or activities. Exclusion from participation as a member of AUSA or one of its associated groups is also possible. It may also extend to restriction on access to other places such as hospital wards or school premises (where access to such places is integral to the student's programme of study or professional training). The exact details of such exclusion will be specified in writing.

D.4   An order of expulsion, suspension or exclusion may also include a requirement that the reported party should have no contact of any kind with a named person or persons.

Annex E - Determination of the case in the absence of the reported party

E.1   Where a reported party cannot attend the first offered time for a meeting that is required of them under this Code, they can ask for an alternative time to be offered on a different day. Given the importance of proceedings under the Code, attendance at meetings required under it will take precedence over all other University activity.

E.2   If the reported party is unable to attend the rescheduled meeting, the case can be considered, and a decision reached in the absence of the reported party. The reported party will be invited to provide a written statement in advance where this is the case.

E.3   Where a reported party has requested that a meeting's timing be changed to allow them to attend, they cannot subsequently use the impact that changing the time has had on their academic performance as grounds for an appeal or complaint.

E.4   Where a reported party has not informed the Case Manager, or another staff member liaising with them about the case, in advance that they are unable to attend a meeting, it will be at the Investigator or Panel Convener's discretion to consider whether the meeting should proceed in their absence.

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

FINANCE AND RESOURCING COMMITTEE REPORT

1. **Purpose of the Paper**

1.1. This paper is provided to University Court for information as an overview of the business conducted by the Finance and Resourcing Committee at its meeting on 10 November 2022, to provide an overview of the assurances obtained, and for onward noting, consideration and approval of specific items of business, as outlined in section 3 below. The agenda, papers and draft minutes of the meeting are available within the Decision Time Resources area for members of Court.

2. **Previous Consideration By /Further Approval Required**

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	N/A	
Further consideration/ approval required by	N/A	

3. **Recommended Action**

3.1 The Finance and Resourcing Committee met on 10 November 2022 in an online meeting via Microsoft Teams.

3.2 University Court is invited to:

- **approve** the following elements of the University's Annual Report and Accounts package, on the recommendation of the Finance and Resourcing Committee for submission to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) (items 6.1 to 6.9 refer):
  - o Annual Report 2021-22
  - o Financial Statements 2021-22
  - o Going Concern Analysis
  - o Financing Report
  - o External Audit Report, External Auditor's Formal Opinion and Management Letter

- **approve** the proposal to delegate the approval of the Annual Procurement Report 2021-22 to the Finance and Resourcing Committee via circulation prior to submission to the SFC by 31 December 2022 (items 6.7 to 6.9 refer).

- **approve** the institutional Outcome Agreement 2022-23 for submission to the SFC by 5 December 2022, following consideration and comment via circulation by the Finance and Resourcing Committee following its meeting (items 7.3 to 7.7 refer). This is included as a separate item on the Court agenda.

- **note** the Committee's:
  - o consideration and discussion of an update from the Senior Vice-Principal on the Higher Education sector and University developments, including forthcoming industrial action by the University and College Union (UCU) and the shortfall within the September 2022 student intake (items 4.1 to 4.6 refer).
  - o agreement of themes for forward deep-dive presentations during the remainder of the 2022-23 meetings cycle (item 5.3 refers).

- detailed consideration of the Finance Report 2022-23 and its approval of the proposed mitigating actions for implementation to recover the previously approved budget deficit position (items 6.2 to 6.3 refer).
- approval that the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) Steering Group should prepare the Return for approval by the Senior Management Team prior to submission to the SFC by 31 January 2023 (items 6.5 and 6.6 refer).
- approval of the draft planning assumptions and timetable for the preparation of financial plans for 2023-24 to 2025-26, (items 7.1 and 7.2 refer).
- detailed consideration of the analysis of new entrants in 2022-23, year-on-year changes in the overall student population for 2022-23 and the impact on gross tuition fee income (items 7.8 to 7.10 refer).
- consideration of the University's revised Salix Finance Ltd/SFC bid for £4m in funding towards the Hillhead Heating Project (items 7.11 to 7.14 refer).
- consideration of a six-monthly update from the Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) (items 7.15 to 7.17 refer).
- receipt and consideration of an update from the Investment Committee in respect of the University's endowment, Development Trust and Northern College portfolios (items 8.1 and 8.2 refer).

4. Introductions

Senior Vice-Principal's Introduction

4.1. An update was provided by the Senior Vice-Principal to outline developments within the University and the external operating environment, with a particular focus on the forthcoming industrial action planned by the University and College Union (UCU) and an identified shortfall within the student intake for September 2022.

4.2. The Committee noted that the UCU had achieved a mandate for industrial action, having significantly passed the 50% turnout threshold amongst its members following a national aggregated ballot. Three days of strike action were scheduled for 24, 25, and 30 November 2022, with a further escalation of action to include a marking and assessment boycott in 2023. The key issues on which members had voted for industrial action were in relation to pay and pensions

4.3. The Committee was assured that a Strike Contingency Planning Group was meeting regularly, and cover had been arranged for all University events scheduled on dates where strike action was now planned. Work was ongoing with academic Schools to complete the setting of assessments prior to the forthcoming boycott. The University had long-standing good local relations with the Trade Unions, and meetings and discussions were continuing in support of this close partnership working, with the University and the UCU currently discussing a joint statement to highlight areas of agreement.

4.4. The Committee expressed concern at the potential impact of industrial action on students and sought confirmation of the current feeling amongst students with regard to the issue. It was confirmed that the National Union of Students was generally supportive of strike action, despite the potential inconvenience to its members. AUSA identified a lower level of engagement with UCU amongst students since the pandemic and was planning information stalls and teach outs during November to raise student awareness of the issue.

4.5. It was also reported that the University's September 2022 student intake was currently lower than anticipated, particularly with regard to international student numbers. Overall, revenue growth of 9% had been achieved for 2022-23, however the University had budgeted for a more significant rise. Given the current inflationary context, this represented a disappointing result, with growth coming only from the price effect of fee increases and not a corresponding rise in volume, despite a 40% increase in applications.

4.6 Detailed discussion took place regarding the issues identified, their impact on the University's financial position for 2022-23 and the mitigating actions proposed by the University to address the situation (items 6.2 to 6.4 and 7.10 refer in further detail). The Committee expressed significant concern at the shortfall, requesting further exploration of the issues and the

development of a corresponding action plan, and stressing the importance of improvements for the January 2023 intake to protect the University's financial position and reputation.

5. Matters Arising

5.1. The Committee received an update with regard to the progression of the Kings College and Johnston capital projects, noting that while the issue of an Invitation to Tender for the King College project has been delayed to support better market response this does not materially impact on the combined consideration of the projects. The Invitation to Tender for both projects are due for issue in February 2023.

5.2. It was agreed that further updates would return to the Committee following the receipt and analysis of tender bids, alongside proposals for the further progression of the projects.

5.3. The Committee also agreed the themes for its forward deep-dive analyses for the remainder of the 2022-23 meetings cycle, as follows:

- Research Income/PGR - February 2023
- Estates and Facilities – April 2023
- People – June 2023

6. Financial Management

Annual Report and Accounts 2021-22

6.1. The Committee scrutinised and endorsed all elements of the Annual Report and Accounts package, supported by a presentation from the Chief Financial Officer to outline the key points in relation to each. It:

- Endorsed the University Annual Report and Accounts 2021-22 for recommendation to Court for approval, subject to confirmation by the external auditor of any adjustments or unadjusted differences within the financial statements in respect of pension funds.
- Endorsed the Going Concern Analysis, noting the recommendation of the Audit and Risk Committee that the University could continue on a going concern basis for a period of twelve months from the date of approval of the accounts, and that the accounts could be prepared on that basis subject to the Finance and Resourcing Committee's approval of the proposed mitigating actions outlined within the Finance Report (item 6.2 refers).
- Endorsed the Financing Report for onward recommendation to Court for approval, noting that the University had met both the internal and external debt service and gearing financial covenant tests for the financial year to 31 July 2022 and that there was currently no requirement to develop a recovery plan.
- Noted the draft External Audit Report, and the expectation that upon completion of the ongoing audit, the final External Audit Report, External Auditor's Formal Opinion and Management Letter would be further considered and approved by the Audit and Risk Committee via circulation, prior to signing of the audit opinion on the financial statements for submission to Court for final approval at its meeting on 22 November 2022.

Finance Report 2022-23: Position and Projection
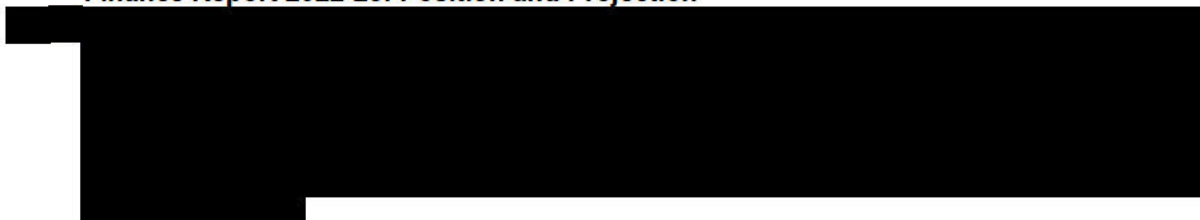
TRAC Return 2021-22

6.5.   The Committee considered a report from the Chief Financial Officer to outline the requirements for governance and approval of the institutional TRAC Return and the proposed process and timeline for the submission of the 2021-22 Return to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) by 31 January 2023.

6.6.   The Committee noted that approval of the result of the TRAC return should be completed by the relevant oversight Committee within the University, and therefore approved the recommendation that the TRAC Steering Group be given delegated authority to prepare the final report for approval for submission by the Senior Management Team.

Annual Procurement Report

6.7.   The Committee received a report from the Chief Financial Officer to outline the proposed process and timeline for approval of the Annual Procurement Report, which was due to be submitted to the SFC by 31 December 2022.

6.8.   It was noted that, under the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 (PRA), as a public body which has an estimated annual regulated spend of £5 million or more, the University was required to prepare and publish an annual procurement report as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of its financial year.

6.9.   It was agreed by the Committee that approval would be sought from Court at its meeting on 22 November 2022 to delegate authority to the Finance and Resourcing Committee for the approval of the Annual Procurement Report via circulation prior to submission to the SFC.

7.   **Planning and Resourcing**

Draft Planning Assumptions

7.1.   The Committee received and approved proposals from the Chief Financial Officer for approval of the draft planning assumptions and initial proposed timetable for the preparation of financial plans for the three years 2023-24 to 2025-26.

7.2.   It was noted that the draft assumptions may be subject to change in the case of any subsequent amendments to pay awards, pension contributions or SFC funding, and in relation to academic fee income, national pay awards and utility costs, which may require revision to indicative budgets in June 2022 due to pressures in the external and economic environment. Additional refinement of the assumptions would also take place in January 2023, once the outturn student intake numbers were known.

SFC Outcome Agreement

7.3.   The Committee received an update from the Director of Planning on the Outcome Agreement process for 2022-23, in line with guidance received by the University from the SFC on 3 October 2022.

7.4.   It was noted that, as with the previous two years, the arrangements put in place this year by the SFC remained transitionary. Consequently, the request was for an output which was narrower in focus than under previous arrangements pre-pandemic, with the focus retained on in-year reporting and the same set of priority areas. The ongoing transitionary approach was designed to further support the SFC Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability, with outcomes expected to emerge from that over the course of the academic year.

7.5.   Given the late publication of SFC Guidance during 2022, it had not been possible to provide the Outcome Agreement under the current agenda for the Committee's consideration and comment, therefore it was proposed and agreed that, following endorsement by the Senior Management Team, the final Outcome Agreement would be presented to the Committee via circulation in parallel with presentation to Court for approval at its next meeting on 22 November 2022.

7.6. It was confirmed that the final submission of the Outcome Agreement 2022-23 to the SFC was due by 5 December 2022, alongside a self-evaluation of performance against the Outcome Agreement 2021-22 and an updated version of the University Innovation Fund (UIF) Report.

7.7. The Committee noted the detailed guidance, commenting on the focus on skills in support of economic transformation and stressing the importance of highlighting how the University's research based contributed to the skills agenda.

Student Population Survey

7.8. The Committee received a report from the Vice-Principal Global Engagement to provide analysis of new entrants in 2022-23, year-on-year changes in the overall student population for 2022-23 and the impact on gross tuition fee income.

7.9. The Committee offered thanks and congratulations to the Vice-Principal Global Engagement and the Student Recruitment Team for the successes achieved in driving high levels of interest and applications (up 40% on the previous year), and it was noted that under earlier agenda items the Committee had urged urgent and detailed action planning and the development of a robust end-to-end process to address issues in respect of applications processing and conversion activity.

7.10. Detailed discussion followed as to the challenges experienced during the September 2022 intake period, the range of additional options for improvements being explored and implemented by the University, the forward requirements in terms of market development and differentiation and updates on the University's various international student markets. It was agreed that a breakdown of international recruitment by region would be provided to the Committee at its next scheduled meeting in February 2023.

SFC Loan Application

7.11. The Committee received a report from the University Secretary to outline the process and timescales for the Committee's approval of a revised application to SALIX for SFC funding towards the Hillhead Heating Project.

7.12. It was reported that in 2019-20 the University had secured a SALIX/SFC loan to the value of £4m to support the redevelopment of the Hillhead heating system. Delays experienced as a result of the pandemic had allowed a reassessment of the proposed system as net-zero plans were further developed, and it had been agreed that the original proposals for primary gas-fired and secondary biomass-fuelled heating sources had been overtaken.

7.13. The University aimed to return to the SFC by 22 November 2022 with a revised project proposal to upgrade the distribution pipework network in readiness for the subsequent installation of a low-carbon heating source, requiring significant engineering work.

7.14. It was agreed that the revised capital project documentation would return to the Committee via circulation for approval.

AUSA Funding Report

7.15. The AUSA Vice-President Communities provided a six-monthly update from AUSA on the use and impact of the additional funding awarded for 2022-23.

7.16. The Committee noted a range of ongoing initiatives to build the trust and reputation of AUSA amongst the student body, to support the internationalisation of the University and the experience of international students, and to assist students during the current cost of living crisis.

7.17. It was agreed that AUSA's draft Strategic Plan and associated KPIs would be presented to the Committee for comment in February 2023, in advance of its approval by the Student Council.

8. **Investments**

Investment Portfolio

8.1. The Committee noted an update from the Investment Committee in relation to the University's endowment, Development Trust and Northern College portfolios.

8.2. It was confirmed that the market value of holdings across all entities at the end of August 2022 had seen a net increase of £1.1m, representing a 20.03% return achieved since March 2020. As such, the University portfolio remained robust despite the current economic climate.

9. **Further Information**

9.1. Further information is available from Jan Whitfield, Clerk to the Finance and Resourcing Committee, janine.whitfield@abdn.ac.uk

Confidentiality Status: Part Closed – Sections 6.2-6.4

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

COMMERCIALISATION COMMITTEE REPORT

1. **PURPOSE OF THE PAPER**

1.1 **This paper provides a report on the key items of business considered by the Commercialisation Committee on 24 October 2022**. The agenda, papers and draft minutes of the meeting are available within the Decision Time Resources area for members of Court.

1.2 This was the first meeting of the Committee since its formation by Court. The Committee hopes to hold a further meeting before Christmas and for this to be in the form of a workshop to help it further understand the commercialisation agenda, following which it anticipates moving to a more regular schedule of meetings and business.

2. **PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED**

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	n/a	n/a
Further consideration/ approval required by	University Court	22 November 2022

3. **RECOMMENDED ACTION**

3.1 The Court is invited to note the report which is for information.

4. **DISCUSSION OF THE CONTEXT FOR THE COMMITTEE'S WORK**

4.1 As this was the first meeting of the Committee since its formation by Court, the main focus of business was:

- To set the scene and be briefed on the context of commercialisation and the University's current position in that area.
- To explore and better understand what the Committee's role within the framework of governance was and from that, what the focus of the Committee's work should be and how it could add value in this area.

4.2 In support of this, the Committee received and discussed a suite of papers that put the University's current commercialisation portfolio in context. These included:

- Existing Pipeline of Start-Ups, Spin-Outs and Licensing Arrangements
- Benchmarking Against Scottish and the Rest of UK (rUK) Institutions
- Scottish Sectoral Review
- Current Operating Parameters and Investment Philosophy
- Current Policies and Procedures

(These background papers are available to all members of Court, in confidence as commercially sensitive, within the Decision Time Resources area.)

4.3 From these, the Committee discussed:

- The approach to commercialisation of research and spin-out work within the University historically, noting that in a field that inherently had a high failure rate and

with limited resources, there had been a focus in the past on ensuring a small but successful portfolio rather than targeting volume and a higher failure rate.
- The position of the University against a range of key benchmarks, noting where the position was positive, where performance was behind benchmark and where there was potential for growth, and where there were areas of dependency on a small number of projects.
- The importance of identifying where barriers to success were. In this context the Committee discussed whether procedures or culture were the driving factors.
- Defining what success in this area looked like and how progress could be monitored, which was an issue the Committee anticipated returning to.
- The executive management and governance framework for commercialisation.

5. COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

5.1 The Committee received its current Court approved terms of reference and was invited to consider, in light of the background information that had been provided on current commercialisation activity, where further refinements or additional elements should be made.

5.2 The Committee discussed whether the scope of its remit should be broadened to include forms of commercialisation/income growth beyond the commercialisation of research. It was agreed, however, that at this stage the commercialisation of research agenda was significant and that the Committee should be focused on that, noting that the Court had mechanisms to hold the University to account for its performance in those other income generating areas.

5.3 The Committee noted that there were some parts of the terms of reference that could be made more specific/defined but that at this stage the terms of reference were broadly appropriate given the Committee was still at an early stage of understanding the context and defining its role within that. It was noted, however, that the fundamental role of the Committee was to be strategic rather than operational and to monitor the performance of the executive in delivering strategy in this area.

6. FURTHER INFORMATION

6.1 Further information is available from Bruce Purdon, Acting Clerk to the Committee for this meeting (email b.purdon@abdn.ac.uk).

8 November 2022 v1
Confidentiality Status: Open

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

PENSIONS ADVISORY GROUP REPORT

1.   PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

1.1   This paper reports to Court on the main items of business discussed at the meeting of the Pensions Advisory Group of 9 November 2022. The agenda and papers are available within the Decision Time Resources area for members of Court.

1.2   The main points of discussion related to the current position of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) and the University Superannuation and Life Assurance Scheme (UASLAS) and the level of staff participation in these (as the University's active schemes), which is therefore detailed below for the information of Court. The report also notes that training in pensions issues is to be provided for the Group and will be available to all members of Court.

2.   PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER CONSIDERATION REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered by	n/a	n/a
Further consideration required by	University Court	22 November 2022

3.   RECOMMENDED ACTION

3.1   The Court is invited to:

(i)   Note the business discussed by the Group which is for information.

4.   REMIT, TERMS OF REFERENCE AND SCHEDULE OF BUSINESS

4.1   The Group received and considered its remit and terms of reference and an outline schedule of business for the year ahead. In discussion, it was agreed to receive by circulation a small number of amendments to the remit and terms of reference to better reflect the breadth of its role. It was also agreed that the Group's schedule of business should ensure that it was sighted on significant developments arising from the University Superannuation and Life Assurance Scheme (UASLAS).

5.   TRAINING AND ACCESS TO EXPERT ADVICE

5.1   The Group agreed that it would be helpful for the Group to have a training/education session on the issue of pensions and structure of the University's schemes. It noted that this could also be made available to the wider Court membership. The Group noted that the University had sourced a potential pensions consultant provider for this and would look to arrange an online session to deliver this. The Group would also receive at its next meeting background briefing papers to assist it in understanding the pensions landscape at the University.

5.2   The Group also welcomed a proposal that the same provider could be available to the Group as an ad-hoc expert adviser, able to provide an independent view to the Group when required.

6.   REPORT ON CURRENT UNIVERSITY PENSIONS POSITION

6.1   The Group received a paper which provided an update on recent developments and the position of both the UK wide Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) and the University's local scheme – the University Superannuation and Life Assurance Scheme (UASLAS).

USS

6.2 The USS Trustees had provided a number of updates in recent months, providing assurances over the volatility in the markets especially in relation to the Liability Driven Investments and the need to sell off investments to raise additional cash. The Committee received these updates and noted that the most recent of these reported that USS was in a stronger position than many other Defined Benefit schemes. The report also indicated that should this position remain at the outcome of the March 2023 valuation, a reinstatement of benefits or a reduction in contributions might be possible although this was very much subject to high levels of volatility and that the figures were indicative only at this point.

6.3 The Group noted that due to the finalisation of the 2020 Valuation exercise during financial year 2021/22, the University recorded a large increase to its USS pension liability figure. For USS the deficit recognised is the value of the discounted deficit recovery contributions over the life of the recovery period. The University's liability has increased from £40.1m to £98.3m. This was lower than the forecast movements included in the 2020/21 annual report when the anticipated movement after the changes to pension benefits was £76m; the reduction was largely due to a significant movement in discount rates during the year, with a discount rate of 3.3% in July 2022 compared with 0.87% in the prior year. Without changes to pension benefits the movement was forecast to be approximately £145m as at 31 July 2021.

6.4 The Group was also advised that USS had announced the timetable for completion of the 2023 valuation with the exercise planned to conclude and any changes implemented by 1 April 2024.

6.5 The Group was advised verbally of a communication from Universities UK which had only just been received requesting a financial contribution (circa £20k) from larger Universities (of which the University was considered to be one) to support work to take forward a governance review of the USS. The Group noted its disappointment that this UK level work had not been concluded and was still at this early stage. It considered, however, that the University, given its previous support for such a review and in the interests of staff, should agree to the request while also noting disappointment that the work was not on track.

UASLAS

6.6 The Group noted that at the last (2019) valuation exercise, the UASLAS scheme reported a deficit of £9.6m which was a slight increase from the 2016 exercise (£9.1m). Following the 2016 exercise, benefits and contributions had both been changed. The University's contributions also increased slightly following the conclusion of the 2019 exercise with no changes to employee contributions or benefits. The last available quarterly update (June 2022) the Scheme showed a deficit of £1.7m (99% funded). The Group was assured that the University has a pension guarantee in place to match the deficit with the Bank of Scotland.

6.7 The Group also noted that the initial FRS102 (accounting) deficit as at 31 July 2022 was £3.5m, following discussions with the UASLAS and external audit (KPMG) actuaries this was amended to £9.5m having updated assumptions to take account of the current high levels of inflation. It was also noted that accounting year end positions tended to be more pessimistic in their outlook than triennial valuations. The next valuation exercise was due for the (as at) date of 31 July 2022. The University had also provided information as requested in order that the covenant assessment could be completed, the outcome of which is awaited. The result of the valuation exercise was expected to be known in the middle part of 2023 and the University had made a commitment to review contributions/benefits dependent on the outcome of the valuation exercise. Given the current volatility in the markets and the potential impacts on the deficit, the Group was advised that it was not possible to predict whether reforms would be achievable at this point in time. In further discussion of the deficit position, it was noted that there was no indication of any request from the Trustees for a change to contribution levels from the University at this time.

6.8 The question of how the Group should interact with the two trustee bodies for the respective University schemes was discussed. While more complex for the UK wider USS scheme, it was noted that the Chief Financial Officer and University Secretary would provide the conduit with developments in the UASLAS.

7. **REPORT FROM REWARD CONSULTATION & NEGOTIATION GROUP ON EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION IN UNIVERSITY PENSION SCHEMES AND TOTAL REWARD STRATEGY**

7.1 The Group discussed a paper which reported on the work being undertaken as part of the remit of the University's Reward Consultation and Negotiation Group to consider pension scheme participation levels. This provided detail of the opt out/withdrawal statistics for the two schemes, potential barriers to pension scheme participation and to address one of the recommendations arising from the 2021 Equal Pay Audit, work that was being undertaken regarding harmonisation of terms and conditions of employment. In addition, the paper provided information about the University's Total Reward Strategy and what this comprised for staff.

7.2 In discussion of the information on staff opting out from either scheme, the Group noted the importance of staff being well informed regarding pensions choices and agreed, while being mindful of its remit and terms of reference, that it should explore the issue further in terms of understanding any future strategic decisions around pensions and to include this on the agenda for its next meeting.

8. **MOTION TO SENATE BUSINESS COMMITTEE**

8.1 This Group received, for information, a request for a motion to Senate that had been considered by the Senate Business Committee. The Senate Business Committee had not accepted the motion for referral to Senate on the basis that it was out with the Senate's terms of reference, but had acknowledged the interest of Senators in the issue. It had, therefore, agreed that the Pensions Advisory Group should be advised of the request for the motion so as to be aware of the strength of feeling of the staff members who proposed it.

9. **FURTHER INFORMATION**

9.1 Further information is available from Tracey Slaven, University Secretary & Chief Operating Officer tracey.slaven@abdn.ac.uk or Bruce Purdon, Clerk to the Committee (email b.purdon@abdn.ac.uk).

22 November 2022

Confidentiality Status: Open

22 November 2022

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

GOVERNANCE AND NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE REPORT

1. **PURPOSE OF THE PAPER**

1.1 **This paper provides a report on the key items of business considered by the Governance and Nominations Committee on 1 November 2022**. The agenda, papers and draft minutes of the meeting are available within the Decision Time Resources area for members of Court.

1.2 This report includes recommendations to the Court for approval which are detailed at section 3.

2. **PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED**

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	n/a	n/a
Further consideration/ approval required by	University Court	22 November 2022

3. **RECOMMENDED ACTION**

3.1 The Court is invited to:

1) Homologate the reappointment of Colette Backwell as an Independent Member of Court for a second term of office of three years with effect from 1 January 2023. **Section 4.1 refers.**
2) Note the other items of business considered by the Committee.

4. **RE-APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBER, SENIOR INDEPENDENT MEMBER OF COURT AND MEMBERSHIP OF COURT**

4.1 The Committee endorsed a proposal for the re-appointment of Colette Backwell for a second term of office as an Independent Member with effect from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2025. The Committee was also advised that, as has been confirmed by circulation to Court, Colette Backwell had been appointed by Court as its Senior Independent Member.

Recommendation: The Court is invited to homologate the reappointment of Colette Backwell as an Independent Member.

4.2 The Committee received an update on the revised membership of Court for 2022-23 and the associated periods of appointment of members to identify potential points where decisions on reappointment or future recruitment may need to be scheduled as part of succession planning. It discussed the current terms of office of members, in particular those of staff members of Court, and whether there was scope to re-align these and avoid significant changes in the membership of Court taking place in close proximity. It also discussed this in the context of supporting the transition and induction of staff members to Court. It was agreed that this would be considered further by the Secretariat and brought back to the Committee.

4.3 The Committee noted that following the completion of the recruitment process, and under the delegated authority granted to the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee to make appointments, two new external members of the Audit and Risk Committee, Rhibetnan Yaktal and Kevin Reynard, had been appointed with effect from 1 November 2022.

5. **SENIOR GOVERNOR ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW PROCESS**

5.1 The Committee discussed the process that been undertaken for the Annual Senior Governor Performance Review with a view to identifying any changes to the process that should be considered for the next year. It was acknowledged that the process could be improved by: providing more detail to governors on the process and their role within it; changing the ordering of the process in terms of providing governors with the Senior Governor's self reflections first before inviting their feedback; and explicitly providing the view of the Senior Management Team to inform governors in their deliberations. The process would be revised in light of the feedback received. The Committee also noted that the Senior Governor would be provided with the formal feedback from the Court's discussion in October at the conclusion of the 2021/22 review.

6. **REMUNERATION COMMITTEE**

6.1 The Committee received a verbal update from the University Secretary regarding work requested by Court in October 2022 to update the terms of reference for the Remuneration Committee and relating to its secretariat support. Work was ongoing and further discussions, including with the Remuneration Committee, would be undertaken before reporting back to Court.

7. **APPOINTMENT OF A RACE CHAMPION**

7.1 The Committee received a paper that invited it to reflect on the current proposal to appoint a Court Race Champion and to identify a way forward given that no nominations had as yet been received. The Committee was reminded that Court had agreed to introduce the role and to appoint a Champion that supported the University's wider anti-racism commitments. It was acknowledged that there appeared to be a lack of consistency in the understanding and interpretation of the role and the Committee was invited to consider the next steps to be taken to fulfil this commitment.

7.2 The Chair provided insights from Committee members who were not present, including whether the role should be widened to address the wider equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) agenda and that the role as currently detailed appeared to be a significant time commitment for one individual volunteer. It was suggested that the role description should be revisited, especially with regard to the second bullet point with a view to limiting the remit to the activity of Court. Another comment related to the potential for the Champion to lead on reviewing Court papers from the EDI/Race perspective and advising accordingly. Clarification was sought as to whether the Champion role related to Court-specific or wider University activities.

7.3 The Chair invited input from experience of similar roles in other sectors and how best to proceed with achieving the Court's commitment in a manner that was realistic for the individual concerned. It was, therefore, agreed that the Secretariat would explore potential approaches to achieving this and present these to the next meeting of the Committee.

8. **REVIEW OF LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE RISK REGISTER**

8.1 The Committee received and reviewed the Leadership and Governance (L&G) section of the Strategic Risk Register. Following discussion, it was noted that Senior Management would update this section of the register with regard to:

- Covid Restrictions to better reflect changes to the Scottish Government's position following the relaxation of some requirements on universities;
- A simplification of the language used to describe the mitigating actions against the risk related to the delivery of Aberdeen 2040 and to refer to the sub-set of strategic priorities that the Senior Management Team were focused on which further mitigated this risk. The Senior Management Team were also challenged as to what activities had been removed from staff to ensure that strategy implementation was not delayed by staff workload or time pressures. It was agreed that a list of activities no longer required of staff would be helpful to provide to Court at a future meeting.
- To be more explicit about the risk mitigations relating to widening access within this section of the Risk Register.

9. **STATUS OF GOVERNANCE REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION**

9.1 The Committee received and noted an update on the status of the action plan to support the implementation of the recommendations of the Externally Facilitated Review of Governance. Overall, the Committee noted that good progress was being made with only a small number of areas behind schedule.

10. **FURTHER BUSINESS**

10.1 *Committee Chairs Training:* The Committee noted that training to support Committee Chairs in their work had been arranged through Women on Boards and would be provided to those that wished it during January 2023.

10.2 *Commercialisation Committee Terms of Reference:* At the request of a member, the Committee discussed whether the terms of reference of the Commercialisation Committee could be reviewed with a view to broadening its remit to further forms of income generation. The Committee was informed that specific aspects of the University's income generating activity were covered by other committees and functions (strategic development of accommodation and catering for example) and consequently the remit of the Committee should not encroach on those arrangements already agreed by Court. It was noted, however, that the Commercialisation Committee's terms of reference were still under discussion, so there was an opportunity to further refine them, in alignment with other arrangements relating to income generation and the need for the committee to oversee the development of the commercialisation strategy rather than its management.

10.3 *Court Statement of Primary Responsibilities:* The Committee considered, at the request of a member of Court, whether the Court's Statement of Primary Responsibilities that was routinely included within the Court and agenda and papers was sufficiently detailed to remind governors of their duties under charity law. It was also noted that a request had been received to review the contents of the current Court induction programme to ensure this was covered to a satisfactory degree. In response, it was confirmed that current induction presentations contained several references to the duties of charity trustees but that the new Head of Governance and Executive Support would engage with the Court member concerned to ascertain where the induction programmes could be improved in this regard.

11. **FURTHER INFORMATION**

11.1 Further information is available from Bruce Purdon, Clerk to the Committee (email b.purdon@abdn.ac.uk).

10 November 2022 v1

Confidentiality Status: Open

22 November 2022

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COURT

PARTNERSHIP NEGOTIATING AND CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE (PNCC)

1.   PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

1.1   This paper reports on the meeting of the PNCC held on 1 November 2022.

2.   PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	N/A	
Further consideration/ approval required by	N/A	

3.   RECOMMENDED ACTION

3.1   Court is invited to note the report from the PNCC.

FOR INFORMATION

4.   HOMEWORKING REQUESTS

4.1   The Committee received an update on the number of homeworking requests received and approved. It was noted that a review of the Homeworking Policy had commenced now that the Policy had formally been in place for a year. Further information would be presented to PNCC once the review was complete.

5.   PAY AND UNIVERSITIES SUPERANNUATION SCHEME (USS) PENSION UPDATE

5.1   The Committee received an update on the Campus Trade Unions ballots for industrial action in relation to pay offers and/or pensions. The Committee also noted that this was an extremely difficult period with high inflation, cost of living pressure and financial challenges for the University. It was also noted that after the next USS formal valuation there would be further discussion regarding Scheme benefits and contribution rates.

6.   ACADEMIC PROMOTION REVIEW WORKING GROUP

6.1   The Committee received and approved the Promotion Policy and Procedure (Academic Staff) and associated documents. It was noted that the Promotions Review Working Group would continue to meet to progress the implementation and briefing sessions for staff about the new Promotion Procedure would be rolled out in due course.

7.   REGRADING REVIEW

7.1   The Committee received an update on the review of the Regrading Policy and Procedure for Professional Services staff. It was noted that the review was being undertaken by the Reward Consultation and Negotiation Group (RCNG) and would progress in 2 phases. Phase 1 would review the Regrading Procedure and Phase 2 would consider career progression routes for Professional Services staff.

8. **WORKLOAD PLANNING REVIEW GROUP REPORT (WPRG)**

8.1 The Committee received and noted the final report of the WPRG which included recommendations the future direction of academic workload planning for the University as well as the next steps required to aid implementation of any new process. The next stage was to consider how to progress the recommendations in the final report by modelling the workload planning options and to identify digital platforms that could support the implementation a fair and consistent model across the University.

9. **DISCIPLINARY AND CAPABILITY CASEWORK**

9.1 The Committee received and noted a paper providing an update on the number of disciplinary, capability and grievance cases in the year to date and the time taken to complete each case. The update was presented to the Committee for review and to provide the opportunity for further discussion and feedback and to raise points of concern at PNCC.

10. **POLICY APPROVAL**

10.1 **Protection of Vulnerable Groups Policy (PVG)**

The Committee received and approved the revised Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) Policy. The Policy had been updated to reflect current Disclosure Scotland guidance with regards to PVG checks and our obligations for referrals. It also reflected current data protection legislation and the new online application process. The Policy had also been updated to include clearer reference to PVG checks undertaken for students entering relevant degree programmes.

10.2 **Menopause Policy**

The Committee received and approved the new Menopause Policy. The Menopause Policy and its appendices were developed to provide advice and guidance to staff and students experiencing the menopause. It also provides guidance for managers, colleagues, tutors, support staff and students. The University is seeking, through this Policy and appropriate communication and training for staff and line managers, to create an environment where all staff and students feel confident to raise issues about their menopause symptoms and to ask for support. This was welcomed by PNCC as a positive step forward.

11. **FURTHER INFORMATION**

11.1 Further information is available from Catherine Cook, Clerk to the Partnership Negotiating and Consultative Committee (c.cook@abdn.ac.uk) or Debbie Dyker, Director of People, (d.j.dyker@abdn.ac.uk)

8 November 2022

Confidentiality Status: Open