

## **UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**

### **Outcome Agreement: 2012/13**

#### **STRATEGIC CONTEXT**

The University of Aberdeen has provided excellence in learning and teaching for five hundred years, exporting outstanding graduates and world-shaping ideas from our corner of North-East Scotland to the far reaches of the globe.

Our Strategic Plan for the period 2011-15 has been developed not just by the Principal, the senior management team and the governors, but by the entire University community. This Plan, which will shape our actions over the next few years, builds on our history but is rooted firmly in the realities of twenty-first century life. It also builds on the success of the last few years in which we have encouraged creativity in our academic staff; broken new ground with our new curriculum; and built wonderful facilities. As a result, student numbers have risen and our students are truly excited and challenged by their education.

Our ambition is to build on our history to enhance the University of Aberdeen's reputation as one of the world's leading universities.

Our mission is to be recognised throughout the world as a renowned international university, focussing on society's future needs and challenges, employing the best staff and delivering a unique and stimulating intellectual experience for students.

Our strengths are our people, both current staff and students and our alumni, scattered widely across the globe. We will work to engage with all the Aberdeen family in the next few years, through keeping them informed of our successes and engaging them with our plans

#### **STRATEGIC VALUES**

Our idea of a university is centred on seven values and we will promote these in all that we do.

##### **Pursuit of excellence**

We aspire to excellence in our research, teaching, work with local, national and international partners, and in supporting and developing all students and staff that constitute our University community.

##### **Internationally facing and at the heart of the community**

Through acknowledging the international perspective of all our activities we will enhance our position as a global university. We are proud to be one of the most northerly institutions in the world and embrace our role as a regional university contributing to the community and making the most of our academic leadership and civic positioning.

##### **Equality and diversity**

We enjoy a diverse and cosmopolitan community which enriches our university, the City of Aberdeen and the North-East of Scotland. We embrace equality and diversity in all our work and encourage all our students and staff to achieve their full potential.

##### **Sustainability and social responsibility**

We are committed to the twin principles of sustainability and social responsibility as foundations for all our activities.

##### **Openness, transparency and honesty**

Our organisation is built around a community, and the success of any community or family is dependent on openness, transparency and honesty. We treat everyone with courtesy and respect, and endeavour to make our processes ever more transparent.

##### **Ambition and innovation**

We will be proactive and innovative in the way we anticipate and respond to future challenges.

### **Adding value**

We aim that in all our activities we will maximise their potential to have a positive impact on the economy, society, health and well-being and environment of Scotland and beyond.

### **OUTCOME AGREEMENT**

The Outcome Agreement set out in the following pages takes as a starting point those University of Aberdeen strategic objectives relating to the first stage Outcome Agreements (OAs) with the Scottish Funding Council and our plans on:

- **Learning and Teaching**
- Widening Participation and equality of opportunity
- Retention
- Pattern of provision
  
- **Knowledge Exchange**
  
- **Support and infrastructure – delivering our academic vision**
- Equality and diversity
- Capital and estate

The University's Strategic Plan 2011-15 covers other areas of strategic importance which are not referred to here, as not being of direct relevance to the first stage OA – in particular research excellence; and internationalisation. It is anticipated that some of these issues will be covered in later iterations of the OA.

### **STUDENT ENGAGEMENT**

We work in partnership with the Student Association in developing our institutional strategies and plans, and have student representation on the key University committees and advisory groups responsible for formulating and approving University strategy, including the University Court, Senate, Student Affairs Committee, University Committee for Teaching and Learning, and the Advisory Group on Equality and Diversity.

In developing and implementing our learning and teaching operational plan, which includes plans relating to access and student retention, we work particularly closely with the Student Association President for Education and Employability.

Specifically in relation to this Outcome Agreement, a consultation meeting was held with Student Association sabbatical officers on 27 August 2012.

## **SECTION 1: Learning and teaching**

### **1 Strategic objective for the period 2011-2015**

- 1.1 *To deliver a high-quality student experience, growing the population where there are opportunities to do so through the recruitment of students with outstanding potential.*
- 1.2 To attract the best students to Aberdeen, and in greater numbers, we must offer them an experience that is second-to-none. We are committed to helping those that have the potential to benefit from higher education to overcome any barriers to participation, and to providing the highest quality of support for all our students.
- 1.3 Good teaching is linked inextricably with good research. Aberdeen has a long and distinguished research pedigree, and in recent years we have invested heavily in recruiting and developing scholars of international standing, all of whom are committed to the joint challenges of excellence in teaching and research. We will continue to develop and enhance our teaching facilities, to allow students at all levels to have access to the best.
- 1.4 We will continue to work with employers to ensure that we imbue our students with the additional skills which will make them competitive in a challenging employment market, and through our co-curricular activities, we will provide our students with opportunities that enhance transferable skills and employability. We will also continue to develop the STAR (Students Taking Active Roles) Award to recognise those who have undertaken roles outside of their academic studies, in order to develop their transferable skills and competencies.
- 1.5 A university education is more than just that which is experienced in the classroom and our campus reflects this. In recent years we have spent £270 million to provide our students and staff with the best possible environment, while preserving the fine and ancient buildings at the heart of the University. The Aberdeen Sports Village, the Suttie Centre for Teaching and Learning in Healthcare, and the iconic new library form the backdrop to a first-class student experience. We are now developing the next stage of our 10-Capital Plan, which includes a series of projects specifically in support of the student experience.
- 1.6 Specifically in relation to our 2012/13 Outcome Agreement we will:
- recruit the most talented students from the widest possible range of backgrounds
  - set the highest standards of teaching, linked with our research and scholarly activity, along with a high level of support for our staff which celebrates their achievements in teaching
  - offer first-class postgraduate and undergraduate courses that are flexible enough to meet the changing demands of the employment market
  - improve continually assessment and feedback mechanisms
  - improve continually our rates of student retention and continuation
  - improve continually our rates of graduate employment
  - provide the support that our diverse student population should expect from an international institution, embedding the principles of equality and diversity in all our activities
  - ensure that our students have informed expectations and both see themselves and are seen as valued partners in the University community

### **2 Student population**

- 2.1 A breakdown of our student population is shown at **appendix 1**.
- 2.2 In order to keep pace with our competitor institutions and maintain our position within the top 150 in the world, over the next few years we will grow numbers of postgraduate students and international students, and our Strategic Plan sets out targets for these populations.

- 2.3 Around 20% of the undergraduate population is from the Rest of the UK, and we hope to maintain this population in order to ensure the diversity of the population and to ensure continuity of funding. However, with the removal of the cap for AAB and ABB students in England, we anticipate that this will be extremely challenging.
- 2.4 We are strongly committed to providing education to our local community. Over 50% of our student population is domiciled in Scotland, and 47% domiciled in Grampian or the Highlands and Islands. In 2012/13, we will maintain the same number of places for Scottish and EU domiciled students as in 2011/12, although we would welcome an opportunity to further expand this population in support of the Scottish Government's priorities, through an increase to funded student places and to our indicative number.
- 2.5 Our diverse and cosmopolitan student community enriches our university, the City of Aberdeen and the North-East of Scotland. As part of our obligations under Equality and Diversity legislation, we monitor and report on our student population broken down by protected characteristic, to ensure that we address any areas for concern and work to better sector benchmarks where available.

### 3 **Widening participation**

#### 3.1 ***Admissions policy***

- 3.1.1 Admission to the University of Aberdeen is entirely on merit and on the basis of ability to achieve and we are committed to treating all applicants within the admissions cycle fairly. Applications for admission to all courses are considered without regard to any inappropriate distinction e.g. ethnicity or national origin, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, gender, religious or political beliefs, marital status or socio-economic background.
- 3.1.2 Our admissions selectors are all academic subject experts, who will be guided by personal statements, references and any other information provided. This allows selectors to consider the applicant's future ability to achieve when making admissions decisions. Where making decisions about individual applications, particularly where academic qualifications may be less strong, contextual information from applicants, for example that on care leavers, parental education and ethnicity may be used to supplement the overall picture of a candidate. Mature students and students who have suffered educational hardship or disruption (including students with disabilities), may receive special consideration.
- 3.1.3 Our admissions policy is available at: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/undergraduate/admissions-policy.php>.
- 3.1.4 Groups that we are targeting through our widening participation strategies include those from state schools and specifically those from low participation schools, particularly those seeking to enter the professions.
- 3.1.5 For 2012/13, in order to increase participation from these groups, our activities include the following:
- partnering with schools with a poor track-record of school-leavers entering higher education;
  - delivering access courses, and offering a Summer School, flexible entry routes (including from Further Education Colleges) and part-time and distance-learning programmes to meet the wide-ranging needs of different learners; and
  - operating bursaries and scholarship schemes

More detail on these programmes is given below.

- 3.1.6 Through these activities we will:

- increase the number of entrants from state schools by 2% between 2011/12 and 2013/14
  - increase the number of students entering into year 2 or year 3 under articulation agreements with further education colleges by 5% between 2011/12 and 2013/14
  - extend the impact of REACH, increasing engagement from school pupils in REACH schools by 7% in 2012/
- 3.1.7 The number of postcodes in our local area which fall into the most deprived categories as defined by the Scottish index of multiple deprivation (SIMD) is relatively low, which means that there is only a very small pool of school-leavers. However, we anticipate maintaining the percentage of young undergraduate entrants from the most deprived 20% and 40% at similar levels in 2012/13 as in previous years (for MD20, around 3% of the full-time Scottish entrant population or 50FTE, and for MD40, around 8% of the Scottish EU population or 125 FTE).
- 3.1.8 We do have concerns that MD20 is an entirely inappropriate measure of deprivation across a nation such as Scotland with a highly concentrated urban population and a large (in geographical terms) rural area. The use of MD20 provides biases in the reported data which are impossible to estimate scientifically. Therefore we urge the SFC either to use a more granulated indicator of disadvantage, or to promote the use of multiple measures of disadvantage so as to enable fair comparisons and an informed policy environment.
- 3.1.9 We are constantly reviewing the best mechanisms to target our identified low participation groups and this will be reflected in future Outcome Agreements. During 2012/13 we will review our main access programmes, including the Summer School, to explore whether these programmes can be more effective in targeting school-leavers from low participation postcodes. We will also carry out further work to ensure that we are using the most appropriate statistical indicators in relation to widening access, with the aim of agreeing realistic targets with SFC during 2012/13.
- 3.1.10 The widening participation programmes described below will also continue to have a positive impact on student retention measures (see section 5 below)

## 3.2 **Working with Schools**

3.2.1 In 2012/13 we will focus on three schools' outreach programmes:

- Schools for HE programme: Aim 4 Uni
- S6 Enhancement
- Improving Access in HE Professions: Reach

A summary of activity planned for 2012/13 is shown in **Appendix 2**:

- 3.2.2 Through **Aim4Uni** we co-ordinate activities with the schools in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire that have the lowest rates of progression to higher education. The aim is to give these school-pupils the opportunity to learn about, and become familiar with, higher education, in order that they view it as a realistic possibility for them, and feel comfortable with University life when they join as a student.
- 3.2.3 We continue to work with Schools to extend the range of options available to Senior Phase pupils through the delivery of academic content via our flexible science program and have also introduced an initiative through which we deliver academic content to S6 pupils in subjects to which they might not otherwise be exposed (e.g. Law).
- 3.2.4 We continue to support ASPIRENorth, with whom we have a SHEP progression agreement. Regular activity includes:
- S5 Visits - departmental visits, Student Association workshops, student panels, campus tours, etc
  - S3 – Try It Out Days – pupils take part in a range of subject sessions
  - S4 Residential Events – Subjects sessions, workshops and tours

3.2.5 Events and initiatives offered through Reach attracted over 300 attendees in 2012 compared to 140 in 2011; we will grow this interaction by 7% in 2013. We expect to see the impact of Reach on applications by 2013/14.

### 3.3 ***Working with Colleges***

3.3.1 We have made significant progress in recent years in our work with college partners, and although not funded by SFC for these initiatives, are committed to growing our work in this area.

3.3.2 A total of 77 students from Aberdeen College progressed to year 2 or year 3 of a University degree programme in 2011/12 from courses with articulation agreements. We are working to increase the number of 2+2 agreements with the College while retaining the flexibility for students to enter into second year rather than third year should they wish to.

3.3.3 Our articulation agreement with Aberdeen College includes programmes in the disciplines of accountancy; management; biological sciences; medical sciences; IT and computing sciences; engineering, music; and social sciences. All students who achieve the conditions stipulated in the agreement will be offered a place.

3.3.4 We have a Joint Liaison Group with Aberdeen College and Banff and Buchan College, and liaise regularly with other local providers to exploit any opportunities for collaboration that arise.

3.3.5 Other events in partnership with Aberdeen College include:

- "taster" days on campus for potential students, and attendance at University lectures.
- University talks at Aberdeen College
- discipline-based academic links and networks; and an annual joint staff event.
- focus groups to obtain feedback from students going through the process of applying to the University; and with students in the first year at the University.
- all Aberdeen College students are associate students of the University of Aberdeen and therefore have automatic access to facilities including library and sports.

3.3.6 In 2012/13, we will formalise agreements with Banff and Buchan, and Angus Colleges for implementation in 2013/14. These agreements will include programmes in the following disciplines:

- With Angus College, in accountancy; management; IT; history; and social sciences.
- With Banff and Buchan College, in accountancy, engineering, history; and social sciences.

3.3.7 We will have entrants from Banff and Buchan, and Angus Colleges in 2012/13 (between 1 and 5 from each), although not under formal articulation agreements. We would hope that at least 4 students will articulate from each of the two colleges in 2013/14.

### 3.4 ***Access routes and flexible entry***

3.4.1 Access routes to degree studies not only allow those without formal qualifications to achieve entry to higher education, they also provides a first-hand experience of being a university student, the teaching methods used, and of working with staff from various academic disciplines. Throughout, the aim is to develop the study skills and knowledge base appropriate to study at degree level. The part time **Access to Degree Studies** programme can be studied over one or two years, either on campus or off campus via weekly classes by audio and video-conferencing at various centres across the North of Scotland. Over 200 (headcount) students are currently registered on these courses. In 2011/12, 33 students progressed to degree study at a Scottish higher education institution.

3.4.2 We also run a 10-week **Summer School for Access**, successful completion of which guarantees a place at the University of Aberdeen. As in previous years, about 200 students are registered on the 2012 Summer School. In 2011 around 50% of Summer School students went on to a degree programme at the University of Aberdeen, and a further 5% to study at another higher education institution.

### 3.5 ***Bursaries and scholarships***

3.5.1 Scholarship schemes allow those from low-income backgrounds to benefit from higher education. We offer around 300 new undergraduate entrance scholarships each year, to low-income students with strong qualifications. The scholarships consist of £1K to £1.3K a year for the duration of the degree programme. All UK-based applicants for a full-time undergraduate degree at the University can apply.

3.5.2 In order to ensure that RUK entrants are not deterred from entering higher education because of the introduction of fees for RUK students, we will invest at least 10% of our RUK tuition fee income in bursaries for those from low income backgrounds.

### 3.6 ***Next Steps***

3.6.1 As referred to above, we will continue to review our widening access activities. We will be engaging with the Student Association in 2012 on the development of widening access priorities, feeding into the next iteration of the Outcome Agreement.

## 4 **Curriculum**

### 4.1 ***Our approach***

4.1.1 We have an internationally benchmarked and widely admired curriculum which, by combining intellectual rigour in the student's chosen discipline with a breadth of multidisciplinary experience, ensures that our graduates leave university as critical thinkers and effective communicators, well able to face the next stage of their careers.

4.1.2 In 2008/09 we carried out a fundamental review of the undergraduate curriculum, through our Curriculum Reform project. This 18 month project has resulted in students being provided with the advantages of restructured and enhanced degree programmes, wider student choice, more flexible entry and exit, and enhanced student support and facilities.

4.1.3 Employers, professional bodies, current students, prospective students and their parents, schools and other interested parties all contributed to the review and to helping shape the new programmes.

4.1.4 Benefits include:

- Increased curriculum flexibility, to add further context to core subjects, and to provide opportunities to choose new cross-disciplinary courses focused on real world problems or sustained study in a language. We have not only seen an increase in students studying language programmes but in the diversity of languages on offer (Arabic, Mandarin, French, and Gaelic). 200 students were registered on these language programmes in 2010/11 and 240 in 2011/12.
- Increased opportunities to broaden experience and skills through a wide range of optional activities overseen by the University, such as study overseas, work placements and voluntary work.
- Flexibility to meet today's changing needs, including increased support for study breaks, accrediting completed periods of study, and a flexible framework to allow entry and re-entry to programmes depending on qualifications.
- Enhanced support for students, including more scholarships (see above), a new student centre to act as first point of contact for support services, and new, flexible learning spaces on campus to complement lecture theatres and labs.

4.1.5 Curriculum Reform is about more than just academic developments. It is also about providing our students with the opportunities to participate in activities that will help them enhance their personal development and skills. The Co-curriculum complements the degree programme and includes work placements, voluntary activities, enterprise, study overseas and the STAR (Students Taking Active Roles) Award initiative. In 2012/13 STAR Awards will reward the contribution our students make to the wider University community and recognise the Graduate Attributes developed through involvement in co-curricular activities such as sports, societies and volunteering, and acting as a class representative. The STAR Award is one way that students can demonstrate skills and competencies to employers. Around 80 students completed the STAR award assessment in 2011/12 and we anticipate growth in this number in 2012/13.

#### 4.2 **Science and engineering**

4.2.1 We expect to maintain a buoyant population in science and engineering and will continue with recruitment initiatives and programmes such as our flexible science programme with local schools (see above) in support of STEM more generally. Since 2008/09 we have seen an increase of 36% in applications from Scotland for science and engineering programmes. In 2010/11, we had around 230 fee-only students in the former "Science" SFC funding subject group; and around 165 fees-only students in the former "Engineering" funding subject group.

4.2.2 In order to allow us to support priority areas and contribute to the oil and gas industry, a major contributor to the local economy, we would ask that SFC consider allocating us 50 further funded student places for Engineering, and 50 for Geosciences.

#### 4.3 **Review processes**

4.3.1 As part of our ongoing planning processes we regularly review our provision to ensure it continues to meet the needs of our students and other stakeholders. During 2011, following consultation with the relevant professional body (the Royal Town Planning Institute) we began the process of withdrawing provision in planning. The current undergraduate population is 8 students (FTE), and the final cohort will graduate in July 2014. The University is providing appropriate courses to fulfil the degree requirements and to satisfy student expectations.

4.3.2 Subject to any Government-policy changes in relation to the controlled subjects (medicine, dentistry and education) we have no plans to change our pattern of provision in 2012/13. However, we will inform SFC should we consider any changes to our pattern of provision.

### 5 **Student support and retention**

5.1 We have enhanced considerably the co-ordination and management of our support for students in the last two years and in 2012/13 students will benefit from a single, one-stop shop for all student inquiries (Info-hub) and an associated website which provides information for all students in addition to targeted information for new students, international students, students living in University accommodation, and disabled students.

5.2 We work proactively to improve disabled student access to our programmes, facilities, buildings and social life. 6% of our full-time undergraduate population are in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance, compared to our benchmark of 4.8% and a Scotland-wide figure of 4.3%. In 2012/13 we anticipate that our actions will allow us to continue to maintain a figure higher than benchmark.

5.3 Overall, our investment in student support has had a positive impact on our retention rates, and our strategy and action plans have resulted in the following improvements:

- The non-continuation rate of full-time undergraduate students is at a 5-year low of 6.81%
- Level 1 non continuation also at a 5 year low
- Local students non-continuation decreasing



- 5.4 In 2012/13 we will work to respond to the needs of perceived at Risk Cohorts, who are, at Aberdeen, local students, students with lower entry tariffs, and second year entrants. This includes:
- bespoke events e.g. Events for Mature Students; the local students event pre-Freshers' week for those not in halls to engender greater sense of belonging; tailored induction for second-year entrants; and
  - changed monitoring procedures to improve the identification and support of at risk students
- 5.5 We will extend initiatives to encourage social and academic integration, which include events, student peer mentoring schemes, co-curriculum opportunities and the appointment of Student Resident Assistants in Halls.
- 5.6 We will seek to develop a personal tutor system with effect from September 2013 to provide significantly increased support for undergraduate students in relation to pastoral support, feedback, graduate attributes, employability, and course choice.
- 5.7 We will offer specific types of academic support in relation to numeracy and writing skills in particular.
- 5.8 Through these activities, we aim to achieve a non-continuation rate for full-time undergraduate students of close to 6% by 2014.
- 5.9 We have no set targets for improvement in relation to other groups such as part-time and mature students as the numbers involved mean that trends are not clear, however, we will continue to monitor and report on continuation rates for these groups.

## **6 Responding to student feedback**

- 6.1 Underpinning our learning and teaching strategies is a commitment to the quality of the experience for all students. Satisfaction ratings through the National Student Survey have consistently placed us in the top 20 of UK universities, any by continuing to respond to student feedback, through initiative such as those described below, we aim to maintain this position. However, both the NSS and internal surveys and focus groups highlight areas where we still need to improve, and in the last two years actions that we have taken in response to student feedback include:
- [MyAberdeen](#), an online learning resource to assist teaching, information provision and student feedback.
  - the [student feedback website](#) to support staff in providing the best possible feedback to their students and the [feedback framework](#) to allow clear, full and helpful feedback to students as soon after the submission of work as possible
  - from 2012-13, feedback logs to encourage greater self-reflection on learning and provide a resource to facilitate staff/student discussions around feedback.
  - focus groups with students to strengthen channels of communication.
  - action plans for all of our academic schools to engage with students' teaching and learning needs.
  - introduction of an electronic course evaluation process to facilitate the collection and dissemination of student feedback
  - surveying in earlier years to improve our means of feedback from students
  - [enhanced induction for new students](#) to allow a more helpful transition to the University environment
  - development of [Graduate Attributes](#), which we would expect an Aberdeen graduate to achieve and provided a new ACHIEVE website to enable students to monitor their progress towards achieving these
  - introduction of an institutional wide student survey for students not in the final year of study akin to the NSS survey.

## **7 Employer engagement**

7.1 As described above, the review of our curriculum in 2008 included a wide range of stakeholders including employers. We also engage with employers in number of other ways and in 2012/13 we will:

- ensure employer representation on our Degree Programme Advisory Boards;
- involve employers in assessing awards to students through our Students Taking Active Roles (STAR) initiative;
- run an Alumni mentoring scheme, through which alumni mentor current students and provide advice and support on future career development; and
- invite employers to deliver lectures and events to students

7.2 Together with our curriculum initiatives, by working with employers, we aim to continue to perform better than benchmark in relation to the number of graduates in employment or further study; the latest HESA performance indicators for employment show a figure of 93.7% compared to a benchmark of 92.8%.

## **8 Partnership working**

8.1 We have described above our work with local schools and colleges, with whom we have close partnerships. We also regularly discuss opportunities for collaborative working with other Scottish higher education institutions, both in relation to academic provision, and efficient working more generally. We are currently in the early stages of exploratory discussions with the University of Dundee that may identify opportunities for synergies, efficiencies or new markets for our provision; and are happy to brief the SFC on any formal proposals if and when they emerge.

8.2 Specific achievements in 2011/12 include establishing a shared data centre in partnership with Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen College, and Banff & Buchan College.

8.3 We will continue to pursue collaboration with the universities of Glasgow and Dundee in Dentistry through the Board of Academic Dentistry, with a likely focus in 2012/13 on the sharing of resources in areas such as e-learning and anatomy.

8.4 We will keep SFC informed of any further developments in this area.

## SECTION 2: KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

### 1 Related strategic objectives for the period 2011-2015

- 1.1 *To improve our competitiveness as an international research-driven university, and to be at the forefront of setting and delivering the research agenda, nationally and internationally.*
- 1.2 *As well as encouraging blue sky investigator-led research, to use our broad disciplinary base to focus on a small number of multidisciplinary themes in which Aberdeen is, or has the potential to be, a world leader or global partner of choice, and which fit with our institutional values and characteristics.*
- 1.3 Research and the expansion of knowledge is fundamental to the character of our University. Ideas that have taken root here have gone on to change the world. From the purest thought to the most practical solutions for everyday problems, we celebrate intellectual achievement at every step. But the competition today is intense. It is central to our ambition that we compete at the global level as a research-driven university, not only in terms of research but through leading and impacting on the national and international research agenda.
- 1.4 We will continue to recruit scholars of the highest standing and to provide opportunities for development for those already at the University. We will encourage all colleagues to maximise their creativity and to seek to reach new heights. In undertaking our research we will seek, where appropriate, to partner with the very best scholars in other institutions and in other sectors.
- 1.5 Recognising our mission to obtain true societal impact from our research we will ensure that we work with potential beneficiaries throughout our research, and where opportunities occur serendipitously we will commit to maximising the subsequent societal impact. We will do this through working closely with industry and the public and voluntary sectors.
- 1.6 We will maintain the highest standards of research governance, accountability and responsibility. Wherever possible, we embrace the principles of open access publishing and the rights of staff and students to publish without hindrance. We will expect our researchers to discuss their work with others and with the public.
- 1.7 Our research agenda must contribute to addressing major global challenges, which requires teams which cross disciplinary and sectoral boundaries. At Aberdeen our range of expertise offers exciting opportunities to ensure that we contribute significantly in a number of key areas. We have identified four themes which build on the uniqueness of our expertise, history and location. In taking forward these themes we will ensure that they impact both on our research and our teaching. We will also invest in emerging research themes that fit with our priorities:

**Environmental sustainability and food security** Until the advent of oil, the University of Aberdeen sat at the centre of a region whose economy was predominantly and deeply rooted in farming and fishing. As a result we have developed unique, in some cases world-leading, strengths in environmental, rural and marine research. Bringing together research groups from both the natural and social sciences provides us with a singular perspective on this most pressing issue of our times. We have developed this theme to link to build on the expertise brought to the University as a result of our merger with the Rowett Research Institute.

**Energy** Located in the Energy Capital of Europe, we have developed an unparalleled understanding of the needs of the energy industries over the last forty years. In all aspects of oil and gas exploration and production, from the technological to the human, the legal to the environmental, we are established leaders. We will also seek to expand our expertise to renewable energy sources.

**Pathways to a healthy life** With our established strengths in both basic and translational medicine, we will seek to enhance our contribution to all aspects of preventive and curative health. The rationale of this theme – to achieve fuller understanding of the life cycle and to attempt to improve not only life expectancy but also life expectancy free of disease – has universal resonance. The overall strategy is based around integrating basic and applied research to generate improved health and patient care. There is increasing recognition of the important contribution prevention strategies can make to public health and to minimising health inequalities.

**The North** Today the circumpolar North is regarded as an observatory for changing relations between human societies and their environments. Aberdeen is the principal centre for northern research in the UK by way of disciplines including anthropology, archaeology, geography, literature, music and history, and our collections contain a wealth of items of northern significance. We will seek to work with other centres across the northern world to enhance global understanding and policy for this fragile and sensitive region of the world.

- 1.8 Our internal resource allocation model mirrors the SFC model and uses the RAE 2008 results and Other Activity Indicators to allocate core funding for research. In this way we ensure that we target our REG and RPG on internationally excellent research.

## **2 Context**

- 2.1 In recent years, we have established our position as one of the most successful Universities in the UK in relation to research commercialisation, as evidenced by the most recent Higher Education & Business Community Interaction Survey (HEBCIS). This shows the University of Aberdeen as being third in Scotland in relation to IP revenues and spin-out activities (there are 16 active spin-outs that have survived at least three years and have some Aberdeen ownership).

- 2.2 In 2010/11 we generated over £11M in income from industry; over £600K in licensing income; and £2.7M income from CPD. Our strategy is to build on our success in this area, while maintaining existing levels of research grants and contracts income. Specifically in relation to our 2012/13 Outcome Agreement we will:

- promote knowledge exchange and commercialisation by working with industry, individual businesses and the public sector so that our research creates the widest possible benefits to society
- engage with the public at all stages of research
- exploit commercial opportunities by forming new businesses, licensing technology, creating knowledge transfer partnerships and selling our services to commercial customers

## **3 Strategy**

- 3.1 By 2015 we will create 10 new spin-outs, conclude 25 new licences and generate £1.5M licensing income. To achieve this strategic target, in 2012/13 we hope to conclude 7 licensing deals (compared to 6 in 2011/12) and 2 new spin-outs. We will also work to maintain our position in the top 25 in the UK in relation to research grants and contracts income.

- 3.2 In 2012/13 progress towards these targets will be supported by:

- implementing Knowledge Exchange Strategies for each of our interdisciplinary research themes, which are linked to key economic sectors ;
- targeting actions towards SMEs;
- working with collaborative partners, including through the SRDG-funded research pools
- having in place appropriate support and infrastructure

- 3.3 **Food and drink and Life sciences:** This has been a significant growth area following the University's merger with the Rowett Research Institute, and maps to our Strategic Interdisciplinary Research Theme *Environmental Sustainability and Food Security*. The Scottish Enterprise funded Food and Health Innovation Centre is based at the University of Aberdeen, and Aberdeen is the lead in the SFC-funded *Interface Food and Drink*. The Innovation Working Group for Scotland Food and Drink, which is the industry representative body in Scotland, is chaired by a member of University staff. Under our theme *Pathways to Health* we aim to work with industry through partnership funding of studentships and with a target to have 6 partnership studentships.
- 3.4 **Energy and Chemical Industries:** We have established the *Aberdeen Institute for Energy* to better co-ordinate our activity and further enhance our close links with energy industries and other partners. Our existing collaborations include the Northern Research Partnership, the Energy Technology Partnership and its wider national and international collaborators, the Scottish European Green Energy Centre and National Subsea Research Institute, which is a partnership with industry. In addition we have the Institute of Energy Technologies, the recently formed research centre in Energy Economics and Finance and a Centre for Transport Research that is a co-investigator in UKERC.
- 3.5 In addition to our work on Energy, the work of the Aberdeen Centre for Environmental Sustainability is centred on the environmental impact of the energy industries, climate change, bioenergy, carbon turnover in soils, green house gas, and the implications of land-based wind power
- 3.6 The University is a founder member of the Aberdeen Renewable Energy Group (AREG), established to promote the development of renewable energy.
- 3.7 In 2012/13 we will engage with SMEs across all our activities, including SME involvement in research networks, University hosting of industry-facing events, visiting lecturers, and SME representatives on advisory groups. Our activities to engage with employers, summarised in Section 1, will continue to involve representatives of local SMEs in 2012/13. Specifically in 2012/13, we will focus on the following activities.
- 3.8 The Food and Drink sector. Both the *Scottish Food and Health Innovation Centre* and *Interface Food and Drink* have as part of their workplans targets to reach SMEs.
- 3.9 Encompass: Aberdeen is a partner in a number of ERDF funded projects, including Encompass, ETP support, and Health Science Scotland. Encompass and ETP provides additionally resource to actively support engagements with SMEs and building of new projects with industry. In addition we would expect to make around a further 10 new awards in 2012/13 from our internal fund to support projects with industry.
- 3.10 Interface: We will attain at least a 90% response rate to inquiries provided by Interface, and this will provide the main source of partnerships for the SFC Innovation Voucher Scheme. We aim to secure at least 8 new Innovation Vouchers for 2012/13
- 3.11 Through our RCUK Digital Economy Hub (dot-rural <http://www.dotrural.ac.uk/>), we facilitate a network of SMEs in rural areas, and in 2012/13 will be leading an initiative to bring fast access broadband to SMEs in rural areas. . We have 33 industry partners already involved, and we have attained the status of a Knowledge Transfer Partnership funder for the Hub. This will provide £250k for the financial support of KTPs.
- 3.12 We will host at least a further two industry-facing events in 2012/13, and will review the number of events we hold in response to demand. In addition to hosting events at the University, we will attend a number of external industry facing events, e.g. Offshore Europe, All Energy and the Scottish Technology Show.
- 3.13 One of our Industry facing events this year was focussed around opportunities for European funding for SMEs. We plan to increase our engagement in European funding generally, and specifically for opportunities involving industry and SMEs.

- 3.14 In addition to the Innovation Voucher scheme, the University runs an internal competition using a proportion of the KTG funding to promote new relationships with industry, pump priming new projects and to support new CPD events. We re-branded the scheme this year ensuring that an industrial engagement was an actual outcome. We would aim to continue with the programme next year and make 15 awards in the £5-20K range.
- 3.15 As we take forward our plans, we will actively participate in the development and use standardised agreements through [www.university-technology.com](http://www.university-technology.com). A number of these are complete already including those for clinical studies. We have contributed to the Easy Access IP model via university-technology.com and will promote free IP via the web site.
- 3.16 We will fully engage with the discussion round setting up a Single KE office.
- 3.17 The University is a project partner (along with Edinburgh, Strathclyde and SDI) to market research and intellectual property opportunities to the US markets. We aim to continue this investment for 2012-13.
- 3.18 The University Court has recently approved an investment in principle of up to £2m (from past commercialisation success and our managed investment funds) to participate in a new venture fund which is proposed with investments from University of Edinburgh and Glasgow, Scottish Enterprise, the European Investment Fund, alongside a private investor (RockSpring Ventures). This is to support the gap in equity funding for early stage spin-outs in the Life Science sector, a key economic industry sector for Scotland.

#### **4 Key collaborative partners**

- 4.1 We will continue to collaborate in areas relevant to our expertise. Some examples have been given above; a further example is the North of Scotland KTP Centre which is a joint venture between the University of Aberdeen and The Robert Gordon University. More recently the Centre has become affiliated with the Colleges of the University of Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute. We expect to have 10 awarded KTP projects by the end of 12/13, and to maintain around 12 partnerships in future years.
- 4.2 In 2012 we will participate fully in collaborative proposals through SFC's/SE's Innovation Centre initiative.
- 4.3 We continue to contribute to the Knowledge Exchange strategies of the 10 research pools in which we are a partner and in 2012/13 will be taking forward partnerships with non-HE collaborators such as Pfizer, AstraZeneca, TMVS eCom (Sinapse), Pharamness Neuroscienze (NRP) and Novartis (MASTS) Further examples can be provided but relate to work at an early stage which is commercially sensitive.
- 4.4 Our contribution to the research pools has informed the development of Aberdeen's four major research themes, which will play a significant role in ensuring the long term sustainability of the University's SRDG investments.
- 4.5 In their annual reports, each SRDG project has specified the added value and the impact of working in partnership across institutions; a summary with some examples is set out below:
- SULSA have highlighted several areas where collaboration has brought added value. For example, areas of science new to Aberdeen, such as Systems Biology, would have taken significantly longer to develop without SRDG investment. The Kosterlitz Centre for Therapeutics (KCT) is also linked to SULSA. This has been established to initiate and manage interdisciplinary drug discovery projects. The KCT brings together clinicians, pharmacologists and medicinal chemists. It has extensive industrial links also seeks to commercialise biological discoveries. The Centre has a number of ongoing SULSA projects funded from the 'High Throughput Screening' fund and the 'Chemistry Catalyst' fund.

- The benefits of pooling have been evident through SINAPSE across many research activities. This was reflected in a highly successful 3rd annual scientific meeting. New collaborations have been formed between SINAPSE centres, for example between the Aberdeen Biomedical Imaging Centre (ABIC) and (i) the Glasgow Experimental MRI Centre, (ii) the Division of Neuroscience at the University of Dundee, and (iii) the Institute of Neurosciences & Psychology at the University of Glasgow. These collaborations are expected to reap a number of benefits and one has led to a successful CSO grant award.
- MASTS noted that the recruitment of 9 PhD students with co-supervision arrangements at other MASTS partners is transformative with regard to our graduate school. It is anticipated that during the coming academic years, these students and the new staff appointments will exert a major positive influence.
- Soillse have noted that in each participating institution, the core research staff come from relatively small departments. As such, while each contributes significant expertise in at least some areas relevant to the Soillse project, no one institution could supply the range of expertise that is available through the network as a whole. Additionally, the network allows researchers at different participating institutions who do work in similar areas to pool their expertise, something which will be of considerable benefit to the research community and the broader community which benefits from such research, including government, public bodies, Gaelic bodies and Gaelic community institutions and organisations.

## **5 Support and infrastructure**

- 5.1 Knowledge exchange is embedded across all our activities – indeed it is our expectation that this is the case - including Careers-related initiatives with students, informal research networks built up by individual academic staff, and specific roles for senior members of staff on advisory boards.
- 5.2 Specifically, in 2012/13 we will support and recognise knowledge exchange activities in a number of different ways:
- through the formal roles of our Research & Innovation Unit (<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/research-innovation/>), our new Public Engagement with Research Unit, and a new Researcher Development Unit planned for 2012/13;
  - through the allocation of internal Knowledge Exchange and Transfer Funding Awards to allow researchers to develop research projects with commercialisation potential to the next stage;
  - by formally recognising knowledge exchange achievements in the promotions process

## **6 Public Engagement**

- 6.1 Engaging the public with our research is another element of our approach to knowledge exchange. We have an established programme of highly successful events and are now taking this to the next stage, as we are the only University in Scotland to be awarded funding through the Research Councils *Public Engagement with Research Catalysts* scheme. The £300K grant from RCUK will be matched by the University and will enable the creation of a dedicated Public Engagement with Research Unit, which will also support researchers in embedding public engagement within their own research environment.
- 6.2 In September, we will further strengthen our role in public engagement by hosting the British Science Festival (<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/science/public/2012/>)

### **SECTION 3: SUPPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE- Delivering our academic vision**

#### **1 Related Strategic objectives for the period 2011-2015**

- 1.1 *To have in place support and infrastructure that will promote the achievement of our academic aspirations.*
- 1.2 Without a solid infrastructure support framework none of what we have described here would be possible. All aspirations, however lofty, need infrastructure.
- 1.3 Our success as a university depends, above all, on the talent, expertise and commitment of our staff, students, and alumni. We are committed to providing all members of the University community with every opportunity to develop and enhance their careers and we will celebrate achievements across our entire spectrum of activities.
- 1.4 We are entering a period where public funding for higher education will be constrained severely and we will need to address the challenges of reduced core income. However, our financial position is sound and the tradition of giving remains as strong as it has always been at Aberdeen. We will continue to manage our finances prudently and within our current borrowing provisions. Having set out to raise £150 million, our hugely successful Sixth Century campaign fund currently stands at £196 million, and we will expand our development activities over the next few years. Our widening participation aim will be assisted through increases in studentships support.
- 1.5 Our estate is invaluable. It includes new, historic, converted and listed buildings, each of which plays an important part in defining the character of our university. Recent developments, such as the Suttie Centre, have enhanced our Foresterhill Campus. The ancient campus in Old Aberdeen is a major part of the City's cultural heritage, and we own many of its most beautiful and historic buildings. Over the last decade we have spent £270 million developing and modernising our infrastructure and facilities, and this work continues as we plan for an expanding student population. Our plans also include IT developments which will help create value, reduce costs and streamline procedures.
- 1.6 We will seek to reduce bureaucracy throughout the University and will search for efficiencies in all we do while maintaining our total commitment to excellence.
- 1.7 Specifically in relation to our 2012/13 Outcome Agreement we will:
- develop and support a diverse population of high-calibre staff
  - ensure that the key principles of equality and diversity are embedded in all our activities
  - maintain an estate and infrastructure which support world-class academic activity and public engagement in the most efficient and sustainable way possible

#### **2 Equality and Diversity**

- 2.1 The key principles of equality and diversity are embedded in all our activities. We are committed to a comprehensive policy on Equality and Diversity for all staff and students which aims to prevent discriminatory practices and seeks to create a culture where staff and students can reach their full potential.
- 2.2 In the employment context we are developing and implementing a range of policies and procedures that promote equality and diversity to ensure our employees are treated fairly, are aware of their duties and have equality of opportunity throughout their career with us.
- 2.3 We also recognise that these are equally important issues for our student community. Much of the strength of a university education lies in the exposure of students to different perspectives from a diverse peer group. We are committed to continuously improving and reviewing our approach to widening access, developing student support services and nurturing the diverse learning environment which benefits all students.



- 2.4 The University's Advisory Group on Equality and Diversity has a remit to provide advice on all matters of policy development and implementation, and to assist in the promotion of a culture where equality and diversity are recognised as contributing to the strength of the University. The Group is chaired by the Vice Principal with responsibility for Equality and Diversity and comprises representatives from across the University, including representation from the Student Association (AUSA).
- 2.5 Our policy and related documentation is available at: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/ppg/index.php?id=67> . This documentation includes the University's *Single Equality and Diversity Scheme* and *Action Plan*; and *University's Equality Impact Assessment Strategy*.
- 2.6 The University has a legal duty to undertake equality impact assessments, ensuring that our policies, practices and procedures are fair and inclusive. To support this activity, the University has developed an Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment Toolkit, and has put in place a Staff Contact Group who regularly assist with policy development and oversight of Equality Impact Assessments.
- 2.7 There are also a number of other networks and communication activities in place, for example:
- the Staff Disability Network Group provides feedback on Equality Impact Assessments and discusses issues related to disability.
  - a staff equality and diversity survey is carried out every two years.
  - the University works closely with the Aberdeen University Students Association ([AUSA](#)) to keep informed of the equality and diversity issues raised by students.
  - the University Harassment Adviser Service provides support to employees who feel they are experiencing bullying or harassment in the workplace through a network of advisers
  - Equality and Diversity e-training has been launched for all staff. The first module, 'Diversity in the Workplace' provides basic training on the legislative framework and its practical implications, while the second module, 'Diversity in Teaching and Learning', focuses on the specific issues for teaching staff.
- 2.8 As well as implementing our legislative duties we are striving to become a Higher Education Institution which is recognised for its good practice in this area. As part of our commitment to the advancement of the careers of women in SET in higher education and research we have recently achieved an institutional Bronze Athena Swan Award (August 2012). We are now putting in place plans to achieve submission of at least one departmental silver per calendar year.

### 3 **Capital funding and the Estate**

- 3.1 In support of our Strategic Objectives, we aim to maintain an estate and infrastructure which support world-class academic activity and public engagement in the most efficient and sustainable way possible. The University has a 10-Year Cash Flow Plan, approved by the University Court, which allocates capital funding to identified priorities, and clearly links this allocation to the University's strategic objectives.
- 3.2 At its most recent meeting, the Court approved the next version of the 10-Year Plan, including a building in support of both the University's aspirations in relation to its Energy research theme and science teaching; and a fund to deliver building projects specifically to enhance the student experience.
- 3.3 Further details on the Estate, including recent and ongoing projects are available at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/estates/>

## APPENDIX 1

*Notes to tables:*

1. *Domicile does not equate to fee status. It is not possible to determine fee status retrospectively.*
2. *All figures as at May 2012l except if otherwise stated*

**Table 1: student population by level**

	FTE	Percent
Pgrad R	941.0	7%
Pgrad T	1,610.4	12%
Ugrad	10,893.5	81%
Total	13,444.9	100%

**Table 2: student population by mode**

	Headcount	Percent
Full Time	12988	82%
Part Time	2963	19%
Total	15928	100%

**Table 3: student population by domicile**

	FTE	Percent
Scotland	7,117.6	53%
Rest of UK	2,236.3	17%
European Union	2,291.2	17%
Rest of world	1,799.8	13%
Total	13,444.9	100%

**Table 4: Domicile summary of the Scottish undergraduate population**

	FTE	Percent
University Area (Grampian)	2,600.6	42%
Highlands and Islands	447.1	7%
Other Scottish LA	3,086.0	50%
Total	6,133.7	100%

## APPENDIX 2

### Schools outreach events 2012/13

**Aim4Uni in School:** All 8 Aim4Uni target schools are offered a package of 4 workshops for their S6 PSE Sessions. These sessions cover General Higher Education, Student Life, Student Finance and Personal Statements. In addition, an Aim4Uni representative will attend all requested events from target schools including careers fairs, parents evenings, subject choice sessions, etc.

### Aim4Uni on the University campus:

- Easter Revision School for S4 Maths and English, support for Standard Grade and Intermediate exams – 2 Days – 120 pupils
- RSE Masterclasses – Science activity for S2 pupils – 4 sessions – 30 pupils
- S6 Inductions, all target schools are offered induction events which include departmental visits, Student Association workshops, student panels, campus tours, etc – 3-8 days – 50-80 pupils
- Primary 7 French Days, all feeder primaries of target schools are offered places at the French days which are designed to support progression to Secondary school and to raise aspirations generally – 5 days – 20-50 pupils

**S6 Enhancement** offers practical events to facilitate the Advanced Higher Curriculum to some of Scotland's brightest pupils, often in geographically isolated areas. Planned activity in 2013-13 includes:

- Chemistry - Prescribed Practical Activity Days – Advanced Higher curriculum support – 3 days – 80 pupils
- Chemistry – Spectroscopy Days – Exploration of University Chemistry labs and facilities – 2 days – 80 pupils
- Chemistry - Prescribed Practical Activity Days – Advanced Higher curriculum support – 6 days – 80 pupils
- Biology – Advanced Higher Biology Days - Advanced Higher curriculum support – 2 days – 80 pupils
- Physics – Wave Particle Duality Days - Advanced Higher curriculum support – 2 days – 80 pupils
- Physics – Practical Optics Day - Advanced Higher curriculum support – 2-4 days – 20-30 pupils

**Reach Scotland** provides information, advice and guidance on applying to high demand professional courses, in particular medicine and law. It also works with other universities to offer opportunities and advice on applying to Veterinary Medicine, Dentistry, Architecture, Child Nursing and Economics. Reach coordinates activities with schools in Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Moray and the Highlands, offering a range of on campus activities, work placements, school based workshops and mentoring opportunities.

Current Opportunities in Law include:

- Aberdeen Sheriff Court visits during the Easter and October holidays: Pupils get to meet sheriff clerks, sheriffs and sit in on a court session. This aims to give pupils interested in studying law a chance to discover what criminal law is like.
- So You Want To Be A Lawyer? A careers exploration event held in Old Aberdeen in June for S4-6, where pupils take part in workshops run by professional solicitors and academics from the law school. This event aims to inspire pupils to consider a career in law and instil confidence that such a career is within their reach.
- Law Ambassador Scheme. This project aims to develop links between legal professionals and schools within their community by enabling professional lawyers to visit local schools, offering them a chance to deliver sessions on legal issues. At present we have 14 links developed between law firms and schools in Aberdeen city, Aberdeenshire, Moray and the Highlands.

Current Opportunities in Medicine include:

- So You Want To Be A Doctor? Careers exploration event held in September in the Suttie Centre for S4 pupils interested in studying medicine. Pupils take part in workshops and meet current medical students and professional doctors. This event aims to allow pupils to discover what being a doctor is like.
- 50 Years of Medicine and Medical Science, held in Polwarth in March. This event is open to any S5/6 pupil interested in medicine or medical science. 5 experts from the university medical school and NHS deliver short presentations on what they consider to be the most significant developments in recent times in their own fields (surgery, diabetes, radiology, forensic medicine and sexual health). This aims to raise the pupils' awareness of the diversity of careers available in medicine and medical science, of some of the kinds of research undertaken, and of where medicine and medical sciences might go in the next 50 years.
- Careers in Health, co organised with RGU, Careers exploration event held in January in the Suttie Centre for S3 pupils interested in perusing a career in health. Pupils take part in workshops relating to medicine, nursing, medical science, physiotherapy among others. This event aims to allow pupils to discover the different options they have in health careers.
- Getting into Medicine, admissions talks in schools, presented by Karen Foster. This aims to give in-depth information about the admissions process and tips of how to succeed to pupils from Reach schools that are aiming to apply to medicine within the next 2 years.
- Mock Interviews for applicants from Reach schools who have been given interviews. These are held on campus by current medical students and aim to give applicants confidence and advice for their interviews.
- Medical Student Mentor Scheme. Scheme that aims to develop opportunities for schools pupils to meet current medical students. Students take part in training in order to understand the current medical admissions process. They can then take part in on campus events, visit schools or act as school ambassadors. School ambassadors are linked with a school and are expected to develop an ongoing relationship with a school. They aim to encourage school pupils from S1-S6 to consider careers in medicine and going to university through presentations and discussions. They also aim to give advice and guidance to pupils that are interested in applying to medicine.