UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SFC 2014/15 Outcome Agreement

Introduction

The University of Aberdeen's Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council sets out the University's commitment to delivery of its strategic objectives, in line with Scottish Government priorities.

The 2014/15 Agreement builds upon commitments made in 2012/13 and 2013/14. It will require to be updated following the development of our new Strategic Plan.

For ease of reporting, the University of Aberdeen Outcome Agreement 2014/15 is structured around the 7 Aims within the table "SFC National Measures" set out in: *SFC Guidance: University Outcome Agreement Guidance for AY 2014/15* (July 2013, published version 1).

These are:

> Aim1: Improve access to higher education for people from the widest possible range of backgrounds
> Aim 2: High quality, efficient and effective learning – learner journeys are short, efficient and effective as possible and learners experience the highest quality of learning and teaching and achieve successful outcomes
> Aim 3: Right learning in the right place – secure coherent provision of higher education in Scotland in line with SFC's statutory obligation
> Aim 4: A developed workforce – learners who have the skills, knowledge and entrepreneurial spirit to get a job and progress their career; and institutions that respond to the skills needs of the economy locally and nationally
> Aim 5: A research base that is internationally competitive and improving its reputation and standing in the world
> Aim 6: University – industry collaboration – deliver a step-change in the engagement of business and industry with universities, removing any barriers to the exploitation of research for economic and wider societal benefit
> Aim 7: Sustainable institutions – ensure high quality of governance and management for institutions delivering long-term financial and environmentally sustainable interactions.

To avoid duplication, we do not intend to list the various National Measures contained within the SFC's data sheet at Annex C of the Guidance Notes, but may refer to our baseline and targets carried forward from previous years.

<u>**Aim 1**</u>**: Improve access to higher education for people from the widest possible range of backgrounds**

Outcome
More even patterns of participation by different groups of learners, including those from areas of deprivation, from protected characteristic groups and care backgrounds. An increase in the number of students articulating with advanced standing from HNC/HND to degree level study. More institutions applying best practice in contextualised admissions.

National Measure
(1) The number and proportion of Scottish-domiciled learners articulating from college to degree level courses with advanced standing. **(2)** The proportion of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants from the 20% and 40% most deprived postcodes. **(3)** The proportion of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants from the Schools for Higher Education Programme -SHEP (i.e. schools with consistently low rates of progression to higher education). **(4)** The proportion of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants by different protected characteristic groups and care leavers. **(5)** The proportion of full-time first year Scottish-domiciled entrants from different protected characteristic groups returning to study in year two.

Institution Measure
Evidence that steps are being taken to address any barriers to recruitment and progression for learners from deprived/ disadvantaged backgrounds including those who are or were looked after. This may include:☐ Contextual information, e.g. SAAS, EMA, first in family, care leaver, carer ☐ Institution data on protected characteristic groups☐ Effective support arrangements for care leavers including external recognition of support, e.g. Buttle UK Quality Mark☐ Promoting access and equalities legislation in a way that is consistent with mission. Evidence that institutions (particularly those that are part of the articulation hubs and/or in receipt of additional places for articulation) are maximising opportunities for guaranteed progression from partner colleges. Institutions in receipt of additional funded places for widening access and/or articulation should make reference to the contribution that these places will make to achieving their institutional targets under aim 1.

It is a University of Aberdeen Strategic Objective for 2011-15:

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.

OUTCOME

The University has a Strategic Target (2011-2015) to widen participation through flexible entry routes to our programmes, increasing the number of programmes offering further education articulation routes by 30%.

Widening Participation Strategy

Through the implementation of our Widening Participation Strategy in 2014/15, the focus of widening participation activity will be on potential entrants from the local region. This is because:

- University entrants from lower socio-economic backgrounds will tend to study at institutions within their local region.

- We need to interact regularly and meaningfully from an early stage with potential entrants in order to raise aspirations and make higher education a realistic proposition for those who otherwise would not progress to university.

Groups that we are targeting through our widening participation strategies include those from state schools and specifically those from low participation schools, including those seeking to enter the professions.

Through our admissions policy, we will also continue to consider contextual information at the admissions stage.

Admissions policy

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.

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, home postcode and protected characteristics may be used to supplement the overall picture of a candidate. Our admissions policy is available at: http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/documents/policy-zone-students/admissions-policy.pdf

Schools

In the period from 2013/14 onwards, we will implement an updated framework to interact with Schools building on our existing activities in this area, through:

- **Aim4Uni** we co-ordinate activities with the schools in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire that have the lowest rates of progression to higher education. We intend that our Schools' programme include interaction from primary 7 upwards, with key points at S4 and S6.

- Working with ASPIRENorth

- 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).

OUTCOME
MEASURE 3

As part of our Widening Access Strategy, we plan to increase our direct interactions with low progression (SHEP) schools in 2014/15 with the aim to increase our applicant population from this target group. We have already made direct contact with all SHEP schools in Scotland in relation to 2014/15 entry.

SIMD

We will also continue to support the participation of groups such as those with protected characteristics, or those domiciled in the most deprived postcodes according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), through our Admissions Policy. Although some of the school-leavers that we are targeting through our Widening Participation Strategy will be from the most deprived SIMD postcodes thus contributing to this indicator directly, not all will be.

The University of Aberdeen received an additional 75 places for entrants in 2013/14 from the most deprived 40% of postcodes (MD40 students), giving us an MD40 intake target of 250 FTE (75 plus the actual 2010/11 intake of 175 FTE). As explained in the report on our early indication of outcome, we were unable to recruit at this level in 2013/14 and we anticipate that recruitment from this group will remain challenging going forward, given the level of additional places in the sector and the low

number of SIMD deprived areas in our local region. We remain concerned that the SIMD is not an adequate measure of deprivation in rural areas.

Access to the professions

OUTCOME

In respect of access to the professions, all applicants from Reach schools anywhere in Scotland will be guaranteed an interview should their academic achievements meet our minimum academic requirements and their UKCAT score fall within the top 75% of scores for applicants to Aberdeen.

Under the admissions policy for Medicine and Dentistry, our Division of Medical and Dental Education Admissions Committee will allocate additional discretionary points to applicants whose postcode of residence falls within the fourth and fifth most deprived postcodes as measured by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).

Widening Participation at Postgraduate Level

In 2013/14 we were granted 71 additional postgraduate taught skills places by the SFC. These have allowed us to offer fee waivers to encourage home / EU students, who might otherwise have considered further study to be an unaffordable option, to undertake a postgraduate course.

In 2014/15 we will explore further ways to widen participation at postgraduate level.

Care Leavers

OUTCOME

In 2014/15 we intend to develop our policy in respect of care-leavers, in partnership with the local authority, with the aim to improve our support arrangements and apply for a Buttle Trust Quality Mark in 2015/16.

Protected characteristic groups

MEASURE 4

The University collects equality and diversity data on students. Until 2012/13 we collected data on age, race/ethnicity, gender and disability. In 2013/14 we requested data on religion/belief, sexual orientation and gender identity. Providing this information was optional but we hope that it will allow us to develop future dataset for monitoring and informing future action, and we will continue to build on this data set in 2014/15, and respond to any trends identified as a result of the data collected to date.

OUTCOME

We work proactively to improve disabled student access to our programmes, facilities, buildings and social life. The latest HESA performance indicators (published in March 2013) show an increase of 0.2% in the percentage of our undergraduates in receipt of DSA to 6.2% (this is 1% higher than our HESA benchmark figure). In 2014/15 we anticipate that our actions will allow us to continue to maintain a figure higher than benchmark.

The University's Equality Outcomes Scheme is available on our website at:
http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/documents/policy-zone-governance-and-compliance/Equality_Outcomes_Scheme_29_April_2013_2.pdf

Articulation

The University's first (2013/14) cohort of 10 students from Edinburgh College will articulate into University of Aberdeen degrees in 2015/16.

We will be working with New College Lanarkshire, Motherwell Campus to develop our articulation agreement in respect of petroleum engineering and computing science students. We anticipate increasing this cohort year on year over the period. Additional detail will be added to the Outcome Agreement as the articulation agreement develops.

Measures of growth

OUTCOME
MEASURE 2

For 2014/15 we aim to achieve growth in 25 FTE from widening access entrants to the non-controlled subjects i.e. entrants from backgrounds including low progression schools; the most deprived 40% of postcodes according to the SIMD; or articulating into years 2 (with an HNC) or year 3 (with an HND) of a degree programme.

In line with other institutions, our baseline is from AY2011-12 but it is important to note that in 2011/12 and 2012/13 we experienced unexpectedly high populations and over-recruited, resulting in an unusually small intake in 2013/14.

Widening Access: SIMD postcode measure	Number of SDUE from MD40	Percentage of SDUE from MD40	(MD20 / MD20-40 / MD40 / %)
2010-11	212	11.9	66 / 147 / 212 / 11.9%
2011-12	**230**	**14.9**	**76 / 154 / 230 / 14.9%**
2012-13	257	14	93 / 164 / 257 / 14.0%
2013-14 (incl additional places)	179	16 (forecast)	
2014-15 anticipated	263 (including 10 additional places)	13	

The above figures are based on the University receiving the indicative number for 2014-15 as set out in the indicative funding decisions published by SFC on 24 January 2014 (SFC/AN/02/2014).

In addition to an increase in our number of students from the MD40, we will also continue to focus our efforts on those from low-progression schools and on enhancing our articulation routes with colleges.

Target Group	2013/14 baseline (non-controlled)	2014/15 target
New first-degree entrants – low-progression schools	62	72
Articulation	22	27

We would hope to achieve the figures as indicated above, but given our experience last year (with recruitment patterns not being as expected) we will be keeping this under close review. We will reflect on these targets for later years once we have fuller understanding of the pattern of entry to HE from the SIMD40 cohort in particular.

Aim 2: High quality efficient and effective learning – learner journeys are short, efficient and effective as possible and learners experience the highest quality of learning and teaching and achieve successful outcomes

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Outcome
An improvement in the retention and success rates of learners. Greater flexibility in entry and exit points, where appropriate, to reduce potential inefficiencies in the learner journey where this is of benefit to the learner. Quality of learning provision and learner outcomes assured and enhanced.

National Measure
(6) The number and proportion of full-time first year Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants returning to study in year two. **(7)** The proportion of full-time students starting first degrees with projected outcome of "Degree". **(8)** The difference from the individual institution's UK benchmark figure for students satisfied with the overall quality of their course of study in the National Student Survey.

Institution Measure
Evidence that institutions are identifying significant barriers to retention, and have in place strategies to reduce those barriers, drawing on good practice in their institution and elsewhere. Achieve 'effectiveness' judgment in QAA enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR). Statement of assurance on institution-led internal review (self-evaluation of quality).

We aim to set the highest standards of teaching, linked to our research and scholarly activity, along with a high level of support for our staff, celebrating their achievements in teaching. We want to ensure that our students have informed expectations and both see themselves, and are seen as, valued partners in the University community. We work to respond to the feedback we receive from our students through surveys and engagement with the Students' Association.

From student feedback, we have identified that we need to improve processes relating to assessment and the feedback on assessment given to students.

Improving Retention

Data

OUTCOME
MEASURE 7

By 2015/16 we aim to improve the percentage of students projected to continue (i.e. graduate; exit with another award; or transfer) to our benchmark figure of 90% (baseline: March 2013 HESA performance indicator: 86.2%; 2014 milestone 87.5%; 2015 milestone 88.8%; target 90%).

We continue to analyse data to identify particular groups of students who are more at risk of non-continuation than others, and have introduced a number of initiatives which we believe will help to support these students. We have not had the level of data necessary to look at particular SIMD groups, but the majority of students from the most deprived postcodes according to the SIMD will be local students, historically one of our key at-risk groups. However, there are signs that this balance is changing and we will continue to develop our intelligence in this area.

We plan to extend our review of retention data to include part-time Undergraduate students and agree appropriate definitions of retention for PGT and PGR students to cater for differing categories of PG students, and investigate how current data management facilities can best support the analysis of this data.

Students at Risk of Non-continuation

In previous years, At Risk Cohorts at Aberdeen have been: local students, students with lower entry tariffs, and second year entrants, students from non-traditional backgrounds (e.g. direct entrants, articulating students, and students from the summer school).

Data analysis in support of our Equality Outcomes Scheme shows that retention rates for those with a declared disability are generally lower than the retention rates for students without a known disability. In general, the retention rate is higher in females than in males across all categories of disability. The ethnicity with the highest retention rate is Chinese, while black, mixed and other ethnicity students have the lowest retention rates. These statements refer to the period 2009 – 2011. We will continue to monitor student retention rates by specific groups and seek to demonstrate improvement / positive trends.

Where students are at risk of dropping out for financial reasons, due to unexpected and / or exceptional circumstances, the University has funds, to help undergraduate and postgraduate students, usually by a non-repayable award.
In addition, the Childcare Fund is available to provide assistance with the formal childcare expenses for dependent children.

Personal Tutor Scheme

Following its introduction in 2013/14, in 2014/15, we will be evaluating the success of our Personal Tutor scheme. While our retention rates are improving, we are by no means complacent and are working to identify students at risk of non-continuation using a range of predictors.

Peer Mentoring

OUTCOME

Following a successful pilot in 2012, in 2014/15 we will also review the effectiveness of the student peer mentoring schemes in each academic School introduced in 2013/14, in collaboration with the Students' Association.

The system has been designed to improve retention rates, particularly amongst students at high risk, e.g. students who enter University from non-traditional routes and those who live at home. The Peer Mentors are trained in Equality and Diversity and cultural awareness.

National Student Survey

OUTCOME
MEASURE 8

The University has a Strategic Target (2011-2015) to achieve National Student Survey (NSS) satisfaction levels that place us within the top 10% of institutions.

We are committed to improved participation rates in the NSS and continue to learn lessons from the results, particularly around assessment and feedback. We aim to maintain NSS Satisfaction levels against our benchmark.

OUTCOME

We have introduced a new scheme of incentives to encourage students to participate in the NSS. We aim to improve upon our current (NSS 2013) response rate of 66% with targets as follows:

2014/15: 70%
2015/16: 72%
2016/17: 74%

Enhancement Led Institutional Review

Following the ELIR process, the University has received a Draft Outcome Report (January 2014) which states that:

*"The University of Aberdeen has **effective** arrangements for managing academic standards and he student learning experience. These arrangements are likely to continue to be effective in the future.*

This is a positive judgement, which means that the University has robust arrangements for securing academic standards and for enhancing the quality of the student experience."

The ELIR report highlights the following areas of positive practice:

- Curriculum Reform
- Evaluation leading to transformational change
- Optimising the use of the virtual learning environment
- Systematic student support
- Promoting employability and graduate attributes
- Student partnership
- Clear focus for academic development
- Internal Teaching Review

The report asked the University to consider the following areas for development:

- Evaluating success initiatives
- Support for a more diverse student population
- Pace of responding
- Strengthening the links between assurance and enhancement
- Availability of information
- Detailed use of external reference points.

The University is considering its response to the report and will engage with QAA Scotland throughout the year, providing a follow-up report and attending a follow-up event with other institutions.

Aim 3: Right learning in the right place - secure coherent provision of higher education in Scotland in line with SFC's statutory obligation

Outcome

Universities are responsive to current and future skill requirements of employers. More targeted recruitment to courses of national and regional economic significance. Nationally coherent and regionally aligned nursing provision. Implementation of the National Gaelic Language Plan.

National Measure
(9) The proportion of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants to STEM courses.

Institution Measure
Statement outlining how the institution is responding to evidence of current and future skills requirements of employers, as outlined in Sector Skills Investment Plans and when available Regional Skills Assessments. Statement outlining potential major changes to provision. Specifically, identify any significant changes in demand for modern language provision, together with any intentions to make significant changes to their portfolio of modern foreign language provision. Evidence from Nursing providers demonstrating commitment to collaboration with other providers on a regional basis to fully implement changes to provision. Statement outlining activities in support of the National Gaelic Language Plan. Institutions in receipt of additional funded places for undergraduate and/or taught postgraduate skills should make reference to the contribution that these places will make to achieving their institutional ambitions under aims 3 and/or 4.

Current and Future Skills Requirements of employers and our Additional Funded Places

OUTCOME

By 2015/16 we aim to:
- have filled 150 additional undergraduate funded student places targeted to identified skills needs in Energy; and the Life Sciences (50 in 2013/14; 100 in 2014/15; 150 in 2015/16)
- Maintained the fundable postgraduate taught population at 2013/14 levels (i.e. maintained the additional funded places received in 2013/14).
- Increase our entrants to STEM disciplines, over and above the 37.5 additional places granted to us in 2012/13

Courses benefit from placements, industry-based projects, teaching delivery by industry experts and regular contacts with industry not the least through a growing and thriving alumni community here and across the globe. Several programmes provide a part-time distance learning option and would contribute to widening participation. Several programmes provide flexible entry, making it easier for applicants to start at a date convenient for them.

Specifically, we are addressing the needs of the following sectors:

Energy Sector
The University of Aberdeen's Additional Funded places will continue to be allocated to courses which address skills shortages throughout the Energy sector.

Creative Industries
Although a small (but growing) area at the University, there is considerable expertise and external engagement in three specific areas: musical composition, film documentaries and creative writing

Life Sciences
The course in *Drug discovery and development* addresses skills shortages in biotechnology, pharmaceutical industries and pharmaceutical contract research organizations (CROs).

Food and Drink
Our additional funded places are allocated to a course which addresses skills shortages in nutrition, food and drink manufacturing and services industries, as well as life sciences (healthcare, nutritional research organizations).

Provision in this area has been developed and enhanced following the merger of the University with the Rowett Research Institute to create the University of Aberdeen Rowett Institute for Nutrition and Health. There is scope for increased industry engagement in this course, and the potential of introducing project placements in conjunction with the Making the Most of Masters project.

Forest and Timber Technologies
The forestry sector in Scotland is reporting a shortage of applicants with sufficient technical skills to implement forest management. This course provides industry-specific skills as well as employability skills related to communication, team-working, time-management and research.

STEM

MEASURE 9

In 2013-14, the University was granted 37.5 FTE additional places for Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

In 2013-14, 3% more of our entrants were in STEM disciplines than in 2012-13 (60 more FTE in non-controlled BSc and Engineering, by qualification group).

As part of our Equality Outcomes Scheme, representation and attainments of female students in STEM subjects is monitored and improvements demonstrated.

Language Provision

OUTCOME

For the last three years, the overall percentage of Undergraduate students doing languages has been 7.3%, 7.5% and 7.8% (snapshot 1, 19 October). In 2013-14, a higher proportion (6.1% in 13/14 against 4.6% in 12/13) of our First Year non-language students elected to study a Language through Sustained Study options than in the previous year. This is a trend which we would wish to encourage.

National Gaelic Language Plan

The University of Aberdeen launched its first Gaelic Language Policy and Gaelic Language Plan in April 2013. The Plan, which was developed with the support and approval of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, outlines a number of initiatives that will be implemented over the period of 2013-18. It will build upon existing Gaelic provision, and aims to:

- increase Gaelic's visibility;
- raise awareness about the language and its culture;
- enhance recruitment to Gaelic language and Gaelic initial teacher education courses;
- and increase opportunities for staff and students to use and learn Gaelic.

The Plan, Policy, and other information about Gaelic development at the University is available at www.abdn.ac.uk/gaelicplan.

Potential Changes to Provision

The University has recently undertaken an exercise to streamline the programmes available to undergraduates, removing subject combinations where there have been less than 5 (headcount) graduates over the past 5 years. This is to enhance the organisational arrangements of programmes with a sustainable student cohort. We have no current plan to reduce the range of disciplines available to students. Therefore, this is not a major change to provision, but we draw SFC's attention to it nonetheless.

Aim 4: A developed workforce – learners who have the skills, knowledge and entrepreneurial spirit to get a job and progress their career; and institutions that respond to the skills needs of the economy locally and nationally.

Outcome
An increase in the proportion of graduates in work or further study six months after graduating, and of those in work, a reduction in the proportion in Non-Graduate (as opposed to Graduate) occupations, where these proportions appear to be particularly high. Graduates are well prepared for work and can utilise their skills effectively in the increasingly international labour market.

National Measure
(10) Percentage of Scottish-domiciled graduates entering positive destinations (TBC).

Institution Measure
Enhanced provision of work related learning demonstrated by☐ *Identifying areas of skill* development and skills utilisation for enhancement *Providing baseline of current provision in* relation to placements and expressing ambitions for growth. Enhanced provision focused on internationalising the student experience demonstrated by providing baselines and expressing ambitions for growth in: ☐ *Opportunities to study abroad* ☐*Opportunities to enhance language skills* ☐ Tackling barriers, perceived and real, to students taking up the opportunities offered abroad. Statement outlining strategies/goals for reducing the proportion of graduates entering 'non-graduate' occupations (for those institutions with a high proportion of graduates in this category).

Graduate Employment

The University has a Strategic Target (2011-2015) to achieve graduate employability rates that place us within the top 10% of institutions.

OUTCOME

By 2015/16 we aim to improve the percentage of graduates in graduate employment by 10% (baseline latest figure 2011/12 69%; 2012/13 actual 74%; 2013/14 76%; 2014/15 78%; 2015/16 80%). 2012/13 exceeded the target set in our 2012/13 Outcome Agreement.

We will be developing new initiatives to enhance graduate employability including:
- Increasing the quantity and quality of co-ordinated employer engagement across campus with local, regional and national graduate recruiters and employers.
- Piloting an online career planning resource with undergraduates to complement our traditional career guidance provision.
- Expansion of our career mentoring programme beyond our own alumni to include other industry professionals, hence providing opportunities for an increased number of student mentorships.

Here we set out a number of initiatives ongoing to support graduate employability.

Employability in Arts and Social Sciences

In 2014/15 we are introducing a new course for between 8 and 15 students (upper and lower limits) in the College of Arts and Social Sciences called "Employability in Arts and Social Sciences".

This course will provide the opportunity for students to work in small consultancy groups to develop solutions for problems and projects posed by industry, businesses and the public and third sectors. It will consist of a number of workshops on employability skills along with site visits to the company, business or service provider with whom they are working. Students will experience the issues that surround the work environment and work place culture, explore the challenges of working with a group of colleagues towards a common aim, and reflect upon their own strengths and areas for

development in the workplace. They will also explore how the graduate attributes they have acquired in the course of their degree map onto the experience of work (see below).

We will review the impact of this course in one College and in the longer-term review the options for extending similar opportunities into the other two colleges.

Co-curriculum

The co-curriculum is about providing students with opportunities that will enhance their transferable skills and make then more marketable to employers. Any activities undertaken provide students with an opportunity to achieve graduate attributes. The University of Aberdeen's Graduate Attributes are a wide-ranging set of qualities developed in preparation for future employment, further study and citizenship.

The Careers Service delivers a wide range of co-curricular activities which provide students with the opportunity to develop and achieve Aberdeen Graduate Attributes. These opportunities include: work placements, the BP Student Tutoring Scheme, career mentoring, enterprise & entrepreneurship events, study abroad and the STAR Award initiative.

STAR (Students Taking Active Roles) allows students to achieve recognition for their contribution to a wide range of Students' Association, on-campus/peer support and community-based/volunteering based roles affiliated with the University.

OUTCOME

Around 80 students completed the STAR award assessment in 2012/13 and we anticipate growth in this number in 2014/15.

In 2014/15 STAR participation will be more broadly recognised in graduate transcripts, rewarding the contribution our students make to the wider University community and recognise the Aberdeen Graduate Attributes developed through involvement in co-curricular activities such as sports, societies and volunteering, and acting as a class representative.

It is important that students understand how they are acquiring graduate attributes and are able to demonstrate their acquisition to future employers, and Personal tutors will continue to play a key role here in 2014/15.

Making the Most of Masters and Nodal Network

In relation to the employability of postgraduate taught students, we propose an efficient and cost effective way to sustain and embed the work of SFC-funded Making the Most of Masters (MMM) Project by developing a 'nodal network'.

This will support the current partnership and extend the MMM model to new partners. This network will be made up of 'nodes' of activity and expertise that have their own clearly defined areas of work but are also interconnected and mutually supportive. The basis for such a network already exists through the MMM partnership of three universities (Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Stirling) and three research pools. We aim to place 80 postgraduate taught students in curriculum-based work placement projects secured through the SFC-funded MMM project in 2013/14, building on this further in 2014/15.

Employer Engagement

The Careers Service Employer Engagement Strategy details the strategic direction and aims associated with the Employer Engagement Team based within the Careers Service. The strategy forms the backbone of employer engagement activity with the remit of the development of students' skills, employability and Aberdeen Graduate Attributes and nurturing and increasing university

engagement with external organisations through a number of mutually beneficial initiatives. This strategy aligns with the University Strategic Plan 2011-15.

Entrepreneurial skills

We plan to continue our collaborative partnership and work with the Scottish Institute for Enterprise (SIE) and employ interns to extend and enhance enterprise and entrepreneurship opportunities and the number of students participating in events.

We will be working to raise academic staff awareness of SIE support and the available resources for use in the taught curriculum and increase engagement by students with enterprise / entrepreneurial opportunities. Our Level 3 course in Business Development incorporates entrepreneurship skills and attracts around 100 students from different disciplines.

International Experiences

OUTCOME

We have a strategic target to increase the number of students who have an overseas experience during their time at Aberdeen. In 2014/15, we intend to implement a new Outward Mobility Strategy to deliver further growth.

We hope that our recent change to the timing of the Academic Year, which is now aligned to many international institutions, has removed one of the barriers to students taking up opportunities to study abroad, and will be reviewing the impact of this in 2014/15.

Student Mobility

We have appointed a team of Study Abroad Ambassadors. They are now in post and have already made a positive contribution through their promotion of and assistance with Study Abroad Information Sessions. They will provide a valuable source of peer support for students considering study or work abroad, particularly for our Scottish students, who are a key target for increased mobility.

Erasmus

We have signed up to the Erasmus Charter (approval anticipated November 2013) which sets out a number of commitments for us for 2014/15 and beyond.

In terms of Erasmus, we are on track to send out 166 students for study exchange or work placement mobility via the Erasmus Programme during 2013/14, up from 152 in 2012/13.

By contrast, we are due to welcome a total of 323 students during 2013/14, down from 406 students in 2012/13, which shows that we are moving towards more balanced and sustainable partnerships, though there is still some way to go and a further review of bilateral agreements in due to be conducted.

We are starting to see the impact of Curriculum Reform on the types of student who go out via the Erasmus Programme, as the number of non-Languages students taking part in Erasmus has grown from 57 in 2012/13 to 73 in 2013/14 – these are students who are not majoring/minoring in a Language but who may be taking a Language alongside their main programme via our sustained study options (see *Language Provision* section of Aim 3).

OUTCOME

We anticipate further growth in Erasmus activity in 2015/16 and 2016/17 as a result of the work we will be undertaking in 2014/15.

Study Abroad

Study Abroad welcomes in around 120 Study Abroad students every year for academic year- or semester-long exchanges from our exchange partners in Canada, U.S.A., Hong Kong, Singapore, China and Japan.

OUTCOME

We currently send out around 50 students to our exchange partners for a year-long study abroad. We look to increase this number in future years.

The new scheme "Science without Borders" was introduced in 2012 and invites science and engineering students from Brazil to study at the University of Aberdeen for a full calendar year.

Aim 5: A research base that is internationally competitive and improving its reputation and standing in the world

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Outcome
An improvement in the sector's performance in REF2014 compared with RAE2008. Scotland maintaining its share (relative to the UK) of research council and research charity income; and increasing its share of income from EU Government Bodies. Enhanced research and KE collaboration. An increase in the number of institutions and departments securing Athena Swan awards.

National measure
(11) Ratings of submissions to the Research Excellence Framework. (12) Number of research postgraduate students and research assistants. (13) Amount and percentage share (UK and Scotland) of income from the Research Councils, major research charities and European Commission.

Institution measure
Statement outlining commitment to collaboration across the sector and with industry; ambitions and aspiration with respect to collaboration and the intended impact of these collaborative activities. Statement of assurance that the institution has, or is developing, processes and structures to implement the principles and commitments in the Research Integrity Concordat. Statement of ambition regarding Athena Swan awards.

The University's objective for Research and Knowledge Exchange set out in the 2011-2015 Strategic Plan is to:

Improve our competiveness as an international research-driven university, and to be at the forefront of setting and delivering the research agenda nationally and internationally (University Strategic Plan Objective II).

OUTCOME
MEASURE 11

By 2015/16 we aim to:
−   Have 60% of our submitted research rated 3* or 4* in the REF
−   Be among the top 20 UK universities in terms of competitively-won research income

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Research Quality

Our REF2014 submission is of a similar volume to RAE 2008, spread across 25 Units of Assessment. The University applied a highly robust regime of internal and external review and we are confident that our submission reflects the high quality of research undertaken within our academic community.

Research Income

We also have a specific strategic target set out under Research and Knowledge Exchange within the Strategic Plan, to: Be among the Top 20 UK Universities in terms of competitively-won research income.

Our current position is 23rd, but in 2014/15 we will build on the increased income we saw between 2011/12 and 2012/13 (£57M to £60M).

We have implemented a range of specific measures for encouraging a higher number of quality applications to RCUK and improving success rates including peer review schemes, mentoring and research training, and our action plan for growing EU research income. We continue to monitor our performance through benchmarking with comparator institutions and key performance indicators.

Research Integrity Concordat

The UUK Research Integrity Concordat seeks to provide a comprehensive national framework for good research conduct and governance, based on five key commitments:

- Maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research;
- Ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards
- Supporting a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development of researchers
- Using transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise;
- Working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress regularly and openly.

OUTCOME

The University is compliant with the UUK Concordat through its Framework for Research Governance. The Framework is an institutional policy document which states the University's commitment to, and processes for, achieving the highest standards of research governance and integrity.

Ownership of the Framework document lies with the institutional Advisory Group on Research Ethics and Governance which is chaired by the Vice Principal for Research and Knowledge Exchange (Strategy and REF2014). The Group has responsibility for carrying out regular reviews of the Framework to ensure that it remains up to date, and continues to comply with all external legislative, regulatory and funder requirements. The Group is also responsible for awareness raising and dissemination of the Framework across the University.

Athena SWAN

The University achieved an institutional Bronze Athena SWAN Award in August 2012, as part of our commitment to the advancement of the careers of women in SET in higher education and research.

Following the College of Life Sciences and Medicine application for an Athena SWAN Bronze award in November 2013, the School of Medicine and Dentistry aims to apply for Silver in November 2014.

OUTCOME

By the end of 2014/15, we anticipate an increase in the number of academic departments securing Athena SWAN awards.

Infrastructure

The University continues to invest in its infrastructure to support Research and Knowledge Exchange through its capital plan which includes a new Science Building and a new building for the Rowett Institute of Nutrition and Health to be open by 2015.

Aim 6: University-industry collaboration – deliver a step-change in the engagement of business and industry with universities, removing any barriers to the exploitation of research for economic and wider societal benefit

Outcome
A step change in the engagement of business and industry, through significantly enhanced HEI/industry collaborations including the establishment of Innovation Centres in sectors important to Scotland's economy and the establishment of a 'Single Knowledge Exchange Organisation'. Maximise the potential for leverage of further investment at the UK and European level to further enhance HEI/industry collaboration, particularly for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

National measure
(14) Range of established Knowledge Transfer Grant (KTG) metrics and the Higher Education and Business Community Interaction Survey (HEBCI). (15) The number of SFC innovation vouchers (IVs), follow-on IVs and H2020 IVs.

Institution measure
Statement of ambition in this area, including commitment to the delivery of easy access IP; to engage actively with Interface; and to continue to work with the creation of the Scottish KE Organisation. Priorities and goals for engagement with SMEs – in particular through the vehicle of innovation vouchers (IV), follow-on IVs and the upcoming H2020 IVs. Plans for collaborating with Innovation Centres. Plans and ambitions for engagement with UK and European initiatives (e.g. TSB catapults).

OUTCOME
MEASURE 14

Over the period 2011/12 to 2015/16 we aim to:
- Create 10 spin-outs
- Conclude 25 new licenses and generate £1.5m million licensing income (including fees for patent spend)
- Increase the number of new Knowledge Transfer partnerships awarded by 14 per annum
- Increase consultancy income by 40% over the 5-year period
- Receive £20 million of income from industry

We are making progress towards, and in some cases exceeding, targets in this area, with 12 licensing deals across 2011/12 – 2012/13; 6 company formations; and £8.7M in income from UK industry.

KE with business and industry including engagement with SMEs

We actively participate in the use of standardised agreements and promotion of Easy Access IP via www.university-technology.com.

The University of Aberdeen is fully committed to working with the SFC through Innovate Scotland's Company Formation Framework, which will be up and running by 2014-15.

We will continue to expand our engagement with SMEs, as evidenced through the uptake of Innovation Vouchers though SFC's Innovation Voucher scheme. We aim to secure at least 12 new Innovation Vouchers for 2014/15.

In addition to the Innovation Voucher Scheme, the University runs an internal competition using a proportion of our Knowledge Transfer Grant funding to promote new relationships with industry, pump-prime new projects, and support new CPD events. We aim to continue with the programme in 2014/15.

We have a strategy to access and enhance European Income including preparation for H2020.

We continue our active involvement in a number of Innovation centres, providing input at Board level.

Aim 7: Sustainable institutions – ensure high quality of governance and management for institutions delivering long-term financial and environmentally sustainable interactions

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Outcome

Institutions have in place appropriate and effective governance structures which ensure sound governance, internal control and risk management. Institutions' governing bodies have clear ownership of institutional sustainability. Institutions invest in their estates for teaching and research at a sustainable level.

National Measure

(16*) Gross carbon footprint (3 year period) (17*) Operating surplus/deficit as % of total income. (18*) Non-SFC income as % of total income. (19*) Current assets: current liabilities ratio. (20*) Days cash to expenditure. (21*) Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation. (22) Annual capital and maintenance spend on estates and building as a proportion of value of estate.
These financial sustainability indicators are mainly based on the information SFC currently collect. Institutions will be aware that there is a project being undertaken by the UK Higher Education Financial Sustainability Strategy Group (FSSG) to pilot an Annual Sustainability Assurance Report (ASSUR) which includes a set of indicators on financial performance and sustainability, and financial health. SFC plans to write to all Scottish institutions about the pilot. When the outcome of the ASSUR pilot is known SFC may revisit the financial sustainability indicators.

Institution measure
The financial sustainability of each institution will continue to be monitored through the established financial forecast and annual accounts return, issued and analysed by SFC's Learning, Governance and Sustainability group. Institutions are asked to provide a statement on their efforts to explore and exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness through collaboration and shared initiatives.

Efficiency and Effectiveness

The University of Aberdeen is committed to improving its efficiency and effectiveness and we strive to explore and exploit opportunities as they arise, as evidenced by the following case studies in the Universities Scotland publication "Working Smarter":

Cross-sector shared facilities with community benefit: Aberdeen Sports Village, which was developed through a partnership between the University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen City Council and sportScotland. The second phase of this project, the Aquatics Centre, is due for completion in 2014.

Business process improvement (1): the consolidation of our printing and photocopying services has led to annual savings of £330,000, with additional savings from reduced energy costs.

Business process improvement (2): server virtualisation was introduced into the University of Aberdeen data centres in order to optimise utilisation of physical hardware, reduce per server energy consumption and reduce data centre space requirements. Over 40% of the server inventory was virtualised in the course of 2011-12, creating savings of £270,000 in that year alone. The aim is to reach 80% virtualisation by the end of 2013-14, generating savings of £690,000 per annum. All of this was implemented as part of the recurrent hardware replacement programme and therefore at no additional cost.

Effectiveness and Efficiency in IT: North East Shared Services (NESS) Regional HE & FE Shared Datacentre
The University of Aberdeen was a 2013 "Green Gown" winner for this project to upgrade the live primary data centre, transforming it into a state of the art shared data centre for all HE and FE institutions in the North East of Scotland. Major construction work, the use of innovative technology and relocation of all network and server hardware were all carried out whilst all business operations

were kept running. This project provides a longer term opportunity to share IT assets and services, with the prospect of greater efficiencies.

SHEIN

The University is a founder member of the Scottish Higher Education Improvement Network (SHEIN). As a network of Scottish HE professionals working within the area of continuous improvement, the group exists to encourage the sharing of resources and best practice, online and face to face.

Annual sustainability assessment by institutional governing bodies

OUTCOME

The University of Aberdeen participated in the ASSUR (Annual Sustainability Assurance Report) pilot and submitted its first report in the revised FSSG (Financial Sustainability Strategy Group) format in December 2013, and will do so annually thereafter.

In accordance with the template provided, we have agreed to the following:

During the last 12 months, we have reviewed the sustainability of our institution. We have assured ourselves that our academic and other strategies take account of the environment in which we expect to be operating, and are taking us in a direction where the institution and its core publicly-supported activities should be sustainable. The following elements give us assurance of this.
1. We have considered the set of key performance indicators (KPIs) as recommended by the CUC.
2. We have made assessments of sustainability in respect of each of these KPIs, considered other evidence, and on that basis made an aggregated institutional sustainability assessment. If any of these assessments suggest serious issues which could affect sustainability of these areas, we are planning or will plan appropriate remedial action.
3. We have a financial strategy which includes consideration of the level of cash (hence operating surplus) which we need to generate for sustainable operation.
4. Our expected average Margin for Sustainability and Investment – (MSI) is expressed as Earnings Before Interest, Tax, Depreciation and Amortisation (EBITDA), using guidance issued by the Finance Directors' group (BUFDG). We confirm that we have a realistic assessment for the institution and could inform calculation of the full economic cost of our activities.
5. We are satisfied that our process of selection of the KPIs, and our use of other data in assessing the sustainability of the institution is appropriate and rigorous, and consistent with data reported in annual financial statements; in the financial forecasts; and in the annual TRAC return.
6. If required by the funding council, we could provide more information on these KPIs and the assessments we have made.

Investment in the Estate

A new Estates Strategy has been developed and was approved by the University Court in December 2013.

Investment is planned over a rolling 10-year period, with the priorities for 2014/15 to 2017/18 to include science facilities, a cultural centre and student facilities.

Summary of Outcomes

Aim1: Improve access to higher education for people from the widest possible range of backgrounds

Outcome	Measure
The University has a Strategic Target (2011-2015) to widen participation through flexible entry routes to our programmes, increasing the number of programmes offering further education articulation routes by 30%.	**Local monitoring.** SFC Measure 1 does not pick up increased articulation through the "new" articulated places route, as these students (being funded at the HE rate) will be on the HESA Return from the outset and not necessarily included in College or SQA figures of students awarded National Certification.
Through our admissions policy, we will also continue to consider contextual information at the admissions stage.	**Local monitoring**
As part of our Widening Access Strategy, we plan to increase our direct interactions with low progression (SHEP) schools in 2014/15 with the aim to increase our applicant population from this target group. We have already made direct contact with all SHEP schools in Scotland in relation to 2014/15 entry.	**Local monitoring, SFC Measure 3**
In respect of access to the professions, all applicants from Reach schools anywhere in Scotland will be guaranteed an interview should their academic achievements meet our minimum academic requirements and their UKCAT score fall within the top 75% of scores for applicants to Aberdeen.	**Local monitoring**
Under the admissions policy for Medicine and Dentistry, our Division of Medical and Dental Education Admissions Committee will allocate additional discretionary points to applicants whose postcode of residence falls within the fourth and fifth most deprived postcodes as measured by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).	**Local monitoring**
In 2014/15 we intend to develop our policy in respect of care-leavers, in partnership with the local authority, with the aim to improve our support arrangements and apply for a Buttle Trust Quality Mark in 2015/16.	**Local monitoring**
We work proactively to improve disabled student access to our programmes, facilities, buildings and social life. The latest HESA performance indicators (published in March 2013) show an increase of 0.2% in the percentage of our undergraduates in receipt of DSA to 6.2% (this is 1% higher than our HESA benchmark figure). In 2014/15 we anticipate that our actions will allow us to continue to maintain a figure higher than benchmark.	**HESA benchmark**
The University's first (2013/14) cohort of 10 students from Edinburgh College will articulate into University of Aberdeen degrees in 2015/16.	**Local monitoring**
For 2014/15 we aim to achieve growth in 25 FTE from widening access entrants to the non-controlled subjects i.e. entrants from backgrounds including low progression schools; the most deprived 40% of postcodes according to the SIMD; or articulating into years 2 (with an HNC) or year 3 (with an HND) of a degree programme.	**SFC Measure 2** The University will be using FTE rather than Headcount data.

Aim 2: High quality, efficient and effective learning – learner journeys are short, efficient and effective as possible and learners experience the highest quality of learning and teaching and achieve successful outcomes

Outcome	Measure
By 2015/16 we aim to improve the percentage of students projected to continue (i.e. graduate; exit with another award; or transfer) to our benchmark figure of 90% (baseline: March 2013 HESA performance indicator: 86.2%; 2014 milestone 87.5%; 2015 milestone 88.8%; target 90%).	**SFC Measure 7**
Data analysis in support of our Equality Outcomes Scheme shows that retention rates for those with a declared disability are generally lower than the retention rates for students without a known disability. In general, the retention rate is higher in females than in males across all categories of disability. The ethnicity with the highest retention rate is Chinese, while black, mixed and other ethnicity students have the lowest retention rates. These statements refer to the period 2009 – 2011. We will continue to monitor student retention rates by specific groups and seek to demonstrate improvement / positive trends.	**SFC Measures 4, 5, and 6** **Local monitoring**
Following a successful pilot in 2012, in 2014/15 we will also review the effectiveness of the student peer mentoring schemes in each academic School introduced in 2013/14, in collaboration with the Students' Association.	**Local monitoring**
The University has a Strategic Target (2011-2015) to achieve National Student Survey (NSS) satisfaction levels that place us within the top 10% of institutions.	**SFC Measure 8**
We have introduced a new scheme of incentives to encourage students to participate in the NSS. We aim to improve upon our current (NSS 2013) response rate of 66% with targets as follows: 2014/15: 70% 2015/16: 72% 2016/17: 74%	**Local monitoring**

Aim 3: Right learning in the right place – secure coherent provision of higher education in Scotland in line with SFC's statutory obligation

Outcome	Measure
By 2015/16 we aim to:	
− have filled 150 additional undergraduate funded student places targeted to identified skills needs in Energy; and the Life Sciences (50 in 2013/14; 100 in 2014/15; 150 in 2015/16)	**Local monitoring**
− Maintained the fundable postgraduate taught population at 2013/14 levels (i.e. maintained the additional funded places received in 2013/14).	**Local monitoring**
− Increase our entrants to STEM disciplines, over and above the 37.5 additional places granted to us in 2012/13	**SFC Measure 9**
For the last three years, the overall percentage of Undergraduate students doing languages has been 7.3%, 7.5% and 7.8% (snapshot 1, 19 October). In 2013-14, a higher proportion (6.1% in 13/14 against 4.6% in 12/13) of our First Year non-language students elected to study a Language through Sustained Study options than in the previous year. This is a trend which we would wish to encourage.	**Local monitoring**

Aim 4: A developed workforce – learners who have the skills, knowledge and entrepreneurial spirit to get a job and progress their career; and institutions that respond to the skills needs of the economy locally and nationally

Outcome	Measure
By 2015/16 we aim to improve the percentage of graduates in graduate employment by 10% (baseline latest figure 2011/12 69%; 2012/13 actual 74%; 2013/14 76%; 2014/15 78%; 2015/16 80%). 2012/13 exceeded the target set in our 2012/13 Outcome Agreement.	**SFC Measure 10**
We will review the impact of this [Employability] course in one College and in the longer-term review the options for extending similar opportunities into the other two colleges.	**Local monitoring**
Around 80 students completed the STAR award assessment in 2012/13 and we anticipate growth in this number in 2014/15.	**Local monitoring**
We have a strategic target to increase the number of students who have an overseas experience during their time at Aberdeen. In 2014/15, we intend to implement a new Outward Mobility Strategy to deliver further growth.	**Local monitoring**
We anticipate further growth in Erasmus activity in 2015/16 and 2016/17 as a result of the work we will be undertaking in 2014/15.	**Local monitoring**
We currently send out around 50 students to our exchange partners for a year-long study abroad. We look to increase this number in future years.	**Local monitoring**

Aim 5: A research base that is internationally competitive and improving its reputation and standing in the world

Outcome	Measure
By 2015/16 we aim to:	
− Have 60% of our submitted research rated 3* or 4* in the REF	**SFC Measure 11**
− Be among the top 20 UK universities in terms of competitively-won research income	**SFC Measure 13**
The University is compliant with the UUK Concordat through its Framework for Research Governance. The Framework is an institutional policy document which states the University's commitment to, and processes for, achieving the highest standards of research governance and integrity	**Local monitoring**
By the end of 2014/15, we anticipate an increase in the number of academic departments securing Athena SWAN awards.	**Local monitoring**

Aim 6: University – industry collaboration – deliver a step-change in the engagement of business and industry with universities, removing any barriers to the exploitation of research for economic and wider societal benefit

Outcome	Measure
Over the period 2011/12 to 2015/16 we aim to:	
− Create 10 spin-outs	**Local monitoring**
− Conclude 25 new licenses and generate £1.5m million licensing income (including fees for patent spend)	**Local monitoring**

	Increase the number of new Knowledge Transfer partnerships awarded by 14 per annum	**SFC Measure 14, Local monitoring**
−	Increase consultancy income by 40% over the 5-year period	**Local monitoring**
−	Receive £20 million of income from industry	**Local monitoring**

Aim 7: Sustainable institutions – ensure high quality of governance and management for institutions delivering long-term financial and environmentally sustainable interactions.

Outcome	Measure
The University of Aberdeen participated in the ASSUR (Annual Sustainability Assurance Report) pilot and submitted its first report in the revised FSSG (Financial Sustainability Strategy Group) format in December 2013, and will do so annually thereafter.	**SFC Measures 16-22, Local monitoring**

Outcome Agreement between the University of Aberdeen and the Scottish Funding Council for academic year 2014-15

On behalf of the University

Signed: *Stephen Logan (signature)*

Print name: STEPHEN LOGAN

Position: SENIOR VICE PRINCIPAL

Date: Monday 12th MAY

On behalf of the Scottish Funding Council

Signed: *Laurence Howells (signature)*

Print name: Laurence Howells

Position: Chief Executive

Date: 8 May 2014