1 July 2014

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

INTERNATIONALISATION STRATEGY

INTERNATIONAL VISION

To be a global university through increased international student recruitment and research collaborations, greater transnational higher education presence, and by embracing internationalisation within our culture.

INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY

Internationalisation is a transformative concept, covering all aspects of University activity, bringing an international dimension to research, teaching and administration. As such, it comprises a number of inter-related areas, including international profile, student recruitment and experience, transnational education, research networks, staff recruitment and mobility, partnerships and alumni. An opportunity exists to exploit our existing international strengths and relationships, as well as the international reach of the global Aberdeen community through our alumni, our donors and our teaching and research partnerships throughout the world. There are six core elements that define Aberdeen’s strategic approach to achieving our international vision:

- Institutional Profile;
- Student Recruitment and Experience;
- Transnational Education;
- Research Networks;
- Staff Recruitment and Mobility; and
- Alumni and Donors.

While each of these areas is conceptually distinct, they are fundamentally inter-related and interdependent.

1 INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

1.1 International League Tables

1.1.1 Our ambition and potential through internationalisation is to rise even further as a globally recognised and quality branded institution. International profile is clearly measured by the key world rankings, the most important of which are the Times Higher, QS and Shanghai Jiao Tong. In the Times Higher World Rankings, the University is ranked 27th in the world for “International Mix” and 8th in the UK.

1.1.2 Our overall position on each of these tables has fluctuated, but we have remained solidly in the top 200 and, hence, 1% of the world’s universities. A rise in the league tables is a manifestation and a driver of improvement across all areas of internationalisation and will in turn boost University profile relevant to all markets. Enhancing our position is both fundamental to all areas of internationalisation, and indeed reflective of a transformation in the level and quality of our international activities. Fundamentally, though, these components represent activities which are important to the institution as a whole.

1.1.3 Raising our international profile is also of significant importance, and we aim to improve this by joining a high-profile global university network and by building networks around our strategic research themes, in particular, Energy. We will pursue membership of the World Universities Network or Coimbra.

1.1.4 The following areas for action will result in improving our international league tables in the medium term:

- to maintain and enhance our impressive numbers of non-UK students, currently circa 30%;
to increase our citation indices through strategies to improve research income, REF outcomes and impact;
- to promote the perception of our external peers, resulting in more endorsements in reputational surveys; and
- to target staffing recruitment and deployment in order to improve staff/student ratios and therefore enhance student experience.

1.2 National League Tables and the Student Experience

1.2.1 The quality of the student experience is not only fundamental to maintaining and increasing our international profile, but central to the University ethos and the philosophy of an Aberdeen degree. The correlation between international perceptions and national league tables is important and should not be understated. Consequently, the following actions are planned and will be more specifically articulated in operational plans detailing timings and priorities:

- National Student Survey – Action plans will be put in place to address issues raised by the NSS with particular attention to assessment and feedback;
- Graduate destinations return - We will enhance our careers service to “best in class” and continue to implement the data quality checks in relation to the graduate destinations return, to ensure jobs are coded robustly;
- Entry Tariff - We will maintain our undergraduate entry tariffs at their current highly competitive level;
- Expenditure per student – We believe it is important to target our scarce resource where it will add most value and we will target this resource at academic services and facilities; and at operational spend; and we will also continue to review our spend profiles;
- Degree classifications - We will monitor the effect of the intervention (the new Code of Practice on Assessment) to ensure that marking reflects the appropriate grading categorisation and hence assess the impact on degree classification;
- Improve completion rate - We will focus on reducing drop out through a number of interventions all of which will be monitored; and
- Teaching and Learning Facilities - We will continue to progress plans for improved facilities, such as the new student union, as approved in the Ten Year Capital Plan.

2 STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND EXPERIENCE

2.1 Student Recruitment

2.1.1 International student recruitment is essential in transforming the student experience of all students in the University, while providing an important source of funding, enabling us to build and enhance the capacities of the University. International students enhance the diversity of the educational (in the widest sense) opportunities and experiences, preparing students to participate fully in an increasingly interconnected world. Increasing international recruitment will also enhance the overall quality of students and thereby the quality of the overall student educational experience. Increasing student mobility is also essential in enabling our students to become global citizens. International experience whether via exchanges or internships both transforms intercultural competence and has a significant impact on employability. Student recruitment, student experience, and student mobility are essential elements in transforming all Aberdeen students into international students.
2.1.2 Identification and selection of target markets for international student recruitment is based on market research from several sources:

- our own student data (enquiry/application/enrolment data);
- statistics from the Higher Education Statistics Agency;
- British Council, UKTI, SDI intelligence reports;
- insights from our in-country staff and our agents;
- sharing of information with other UK institutions;
- government scholarship/funding schemes/information from cultural attaches and embassies; and
- established in-country links with institutions.

2.1.3 The University has identified five areas as priority markets for international student recruitment:

- China;
- North America;
- Sub Saharan Africa;
- Middle East; and
- South East Asia.

2.1.4 China

2.1.4.1 China is by far the largest market for the UK, and presents significant opportunities to us. Although the China market as a whole has reduced slightly in the last year, it remains the largest net exporter of students to the UK. With an Aberdeen dedicated in-country representative (appointed in April 2014), enhanced marketing and the development of appropriate programmes, we can grow our market share. The University has prioritised four programme areas for which market research indicates that there is significant potential for growth. These areas are: Business, Law, English Language and Translation, and Engineering. In all areas new programmes have been developed, which are specifically focused on this market. Specific targets have been set for each programme, for the next five years, which will be reviewed annually in order to enable us to work with developing market conditions. It is expected that as the priority programmes achieve their targets, that new priority areas will be developed, particularly in relation to opportunities that develop within the market.

2.1.4.2 While the priority areas will be the main area of investment of time and resources, it is expected that marketing will have an impact on recruitment from China in other areas as well. In the past year we have taken up key marketing opportunities in both print and online media, this activity will continue to be focussed in the coming cycle on our priority programmes. The China context requires a specific range of recruitment processes. Agents, initially with incentivization for recruitment success, direct recruitment, and articulation agreements. Over the cycle we expect reliance on agents to reduce, with direct recruitment increasing in all priority programmes. Articulation agreements, often including some degree of teaching in-market, are becoming the sector norm, and increasingly a preferred model by the Chinese government. We already have ongoing agreements particularly in Business, Law and Engineering/GeoSciences, and have implemented new agreements in relation to English Language programmes. During the next five years we will negotiate ten per year, with new partners, and perhaps equally importantly develop and enhance clusters of agreements with the same partner. Enhancing key partnerships is essential in building a successful recruitment strategy. While the direct recruitment route will increasingly be the primary recruitment method for the CASS programmes, articulation is likely to be the most significant avenue for COPS programmes.
2.1.5 North America

2.1.5.1 North America is another mature market in the UK, already sending significant numbers to the UK, where with improved marketing and a more effective approach to staffing and programme development, we can grow our market share. Overall, the University's academic structure maps well to the North American Liberal Arts perspective and study abroad opportunities. We have developed a number of new programmes, which market research indicates have the potential to achieve significant increases in recruitment. The priority areas are in Law, Medicine and History, and CASS as a whole (via Liberal Arts), with additional potential particularly for PhD recruitment in Divinity. Additionally, the American Study Abroad market has huge general potential for development. The Pre-Law and Pre-Med programmes have been specifically designed to articulate with American Law and Medical School expectations and requirements.

2.1.5.2 Much of the essential foundation for our marketing in the United States and Canada has been laid, particularly in the past year with in-country capacity. Based on our implementation planning, we are exploring different forms of in-country work to fit the needs of our priority programmes, re-basing the capacity in the UK.

2.1.5.3 As in the case of China, the North American market requires a specific set of prioritised actions. Direct recruitment, led by the Dean and International Officers based in the UK, but spending most of their time in market (focused on windows of opportunity) will increase with a focus on fairs, and direct engagement with schools and school counsellors. Bringing Guidance Counsellors to Aberdeen is already a key aspect of our brand development. Additionally, continued development of summer school provision, with a new focus on the High School market will play a key role. Agreements will play a key role in two areas, study abroad, and recruitment from Community Colleges. We already have agreements in place for recruitment of Study Abroad students, these will be increased, with targeted marketing and engagement to increase recruitment, this is likely to be associated with smaller exchange agreements with specific partner universities. We have already begun engaging with consortia of Community Colleges, which typically offer a two year associate degree. These are important feeders into four year BA programmes. This engagement will look to building agreed pathways for quality students into the final two years of our undergraduate programmes.

2.1.5.4 The remaining markets are less mature: Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East and South East Asia are growing markets, without capacity in-country to service considerable populations of potential students. The potential needs of these markets are also closely aligned with our Energy theme and are already showing considerable interest in energy-related programmes in COPS and CASS. In South East Asia, particularly Malaysia, there is a demand for a UK undergraduate education. Marketing in relation to these markets will be in parallel with the implementation of our Energy strategy.

2.1.6 Sub-Saharan Africa

2.1.6.1 The University has performed strongly in attracting students from sub-Saharan Africa (in particular Nigeria) mainly on PGT programmes, with African students being a significant part of our overall international profile. We plan on doubling the current student population from sub-Saharan Africa at the University over the next five years. While Nigeria is our primary focus, other countries are also emerging as exporters of students to the UK. These include Ghana, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. Additionally, we have had conversations about developing agreements with universities from other parts of the continent. The priority programme areas identified for sub-Saharan Africa are Energy (including Law and Business programmes which we have developed that relate to energy), and a range of programmes from the Life Sciences and Engineering.
2.1.6.2 We are building on our pre-existing and successful marketing strategies for sub-Saharan Africa. Agents are an essential avenue of recruitment in Africa. While we currently have fruitful relations with agents in Nigeria, we will need to develop capacity in-country in other key emerging markets. The Foundation Programmes in key areas, as well as our new link with Kaplan in connection with Engineering will be a key source of undergraduate students. We will explore both expanding our own foundation programme, particularly in relation to Business and Law, and continue discussions with external foundations to develop a sustainable route into our Energy and Health related postgraduate programmes. African universities in all markets are looking to form a range of partnerships; our Energy Institute and Dean already have a significant network of connections in these markets. CPD in professional disciplines is also a growing market, with governmental and business clients. We will be increasingly active in cultivating this market, which will in turn raise profile, enhance research opportunities and lead to increased postgraduate recruitment.

2.1.7 **Middle East and South East Asia**

2.1.7.1 As immature markets with significant overlap in potential, the Middle East and South East Asia region is being treated as an amalgamated priority market. For both areas, the priority academic programmes are those relating to Energy, Law and Business, with additional significant potential in Education. Energy is clearly the most marketable area for us in this market, and the Energy Institute is already playing a central role in developing networks and agreements. During the past year much of our activity has focused on South East Asia, particularly in Thailand (where we already have significant profile, particularly in Law), Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. While some of our recruitment in these markets will come via direct recruitment with some utilisation of agents, the most fruitful areas of sustainable recruitment will come through articulation agreements. In some regions, the agreements will be with universities of equal or higher stature, with an interest in Energy, and in other areas with universities whose main goal is capacity building. Our two targets for the development of transnational education are in this general region, Sri Lanka and Korea. Their completion will significantly add to our brand recognition and profile, and can serve as hubs for student recruitment.

2.1.7.2 Work in the Middle East is less developed to date. Nonetheless, important discussions have been taken forward by the Energy Institute in relation to the development of articulated programmes particularly in Kurdistan. Other targeted articulation agreements will enhance recruitment in this region, and will be one key source of sustainable recruitment. Our Education and foundation programmes as well as English language teaching are also key areas for recruitment in this market, both through partners and articulation agreements with universities seeking to enhance capacity. In addition to these areas, Arabic will also be a significant stream in the Translation and Interpretation Degree, which will have its first intake in 2015. Market evidence suggests that this is a strong area for recruitment at all levels.

2.1.7.3 We have reviewed the mapping of disciplines to target markets, and set realistic yet stretching targets that will provide us with market share appropriate to our discipline range and comparators.

2.1.7.4 Our approach to each region is supported by a detailed operational plan. Each operational plan will outline the activities that will be required to meet targets within the timeline stipulated. For example, for 2015 targets, concentration will be on marketing clearly defined programme portfolios with increased in-country face-to-face presence by international recruitment staff at school visits and student recruitment events and greater exploitation of the recruitment agency networks. These activities will be supported by targeted online advertising campaigns, including social media, and generally improving University online presence will increase brand awareness and inform choice. In some markets, local or traditional language publications, whether digital or printed will support these activities.

2.1.7.5 Activities with a longer time range to demonstrate benefits, from 2016 onwards, will be articulation agreements, the introduction of new programmes and the establishment of transnational education overseas in specific markets.
2.1.7.6 Planned activities reflect the size of the market, disciplines attractive to that market (Appendix 1) and the recruitment approach to that market, which, depending on the region, will involve a range of:

- expanding in-country presence using a variety of models to suit the environment in areas identified as strategic priority markets;
- recruitment via agents, which in some markets will require recruitment commissions;
- direct recruitment into all programme levels, including an extensive recruitment events programme;
- recruitment via articulation agreements with partner universities at all levels; and
- year abroad, primarily undergraduates from the North American market (but potentially others).

2.1.7.7 Specific tactics used for marketing and student recruitment are based on evidence from the market. There is a requirement to use a variety of inter-related marketing tactics in order to increase the chances of informing choice in a difficult and crowded market. Face-to-face visits are still very relevant to build reputation and show commitment to international markets and offer an opportunity to meet with students and their influencers. A report by the education consultants Hobsons (Competing Globally, 2013) shows that the three most important ways for potential international applicants to engage are through university websites, online prospectuses, or other electronic communications. Therefore a sophisticated approach to these methods of marketing is essential. Finally, traditional, and in some cases national language printed publications are required in order to communicate with significant influencers such as parents and wider family.

2.1.7.8 We have a planned improvement of the University of Aberdeen’s online prospectuses for 2016 entry, and will continue to improve and update the University website and relevant sub-pages for student recruitment purposes. Our marketing plan also includes:

- development of a University of Aberdeen presence on Chinese Social Media Sites;
- development of the Search Engine Optimisation campaign;
- holding a Virtual Open Day;
- further coordinating the use of social media (Facebook, Twitter and regional equivalents);
- implementing advertising campaigns appropriate to each market; and
- ensuring effective use of printed publications such as prospectuses and course information leaflets and produce these in local language, such as Mandarin. We will ensure that these publications dovetail with all online communications.

2.1.7.9 In summary, in order to grow international student numbers we will:

- use criteria for selecting and changing key markets in which to focus international engagement; reviewing regularly and responding swiftly to maintain our international competitiveness;
- rely on specific market research for markets where there are no existing institutional links. There is flexibility in our system to allow us to react to opportunities which arise in new/emerging markets or when funding policies change or UK government immigration policy affects market performance;
- develop marketing strategies for each key market;
- adopt and implement the (emerging) Digital Strategy as it applies to international recruitment;
- grow our articulation partnerships;
- expand opportunities for students to have an international experience, including through Study Abroad and Erasmus; and
- build our international research alliances into postgraduate research and masters opportunities.
2.2 Student Experience and Mobility

2.2.1 We will enhance the international student experience on-campus and world-wide by building on the commitments of our Curriculum Reform and further enhancing the internationalisation of our curriculum. We will increase the opportunities provided to our students to have an international learning experience and will ensure their curriculum provides them with the skills necessary for an international workplace.

2.2.2 We will create an Aberdeen International Centre in order to provide our UK students with a global outlook and to enhance the experience of our non-UK students. In the short term, the Centre will be located within the Hub. This will ensure a central location for international students and complementarity with existing student services. Services for international students will also be provided from a location at the Foresterhill Campus.

2.2.3 In its first phase, the centre will house:

- an advice point on the specific issues faced by non-UK students;
- the Student Mobility Office, which provides support and assistance to students wishing to have an international experience, and incoming Study Abroad/Exchange students; and
- a social space for students, and, with the input of the Students’ Association, a link to International student societies and activities.

2.2.4 In the longer term, a more developed centre will provide a focal point for visiting delegations, and house services in support of staff mobility. In essence, the aim of the Centre is to highlight the University’s global outlook and increase the visibility of its international aspirations.

2.2.5 In support of these aspirations we will:

- increase the number of students participating in an international exchange/work placement opportunity;
- develop our global careers support and enhance recognition of the University and our graduates by international employers;
- embrace the experience that a diverse student and staff body affords to its community, and support their needs through our capital investment;
- build on the current projects to provide improved postgraduate and family accommodation; and
- enhance our induction and orientation to meet the needs of our international students.

3 TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION

3.1 Transnational education is an increasingly important aspect of university internationalisation across the sector. It provides universities with an opportunity to enhance profile and reach markets that, due to capacity, are not available to traditional modes of delivery. Additionally, key international markets are also looking to have in-country provision rather than exporting their students. In choosing these markets and opportunities, careful consideration will be given to the degree of alignment with the University of Aberdeen’s strategy. While transnational education, along with other modes of diversifying the provision of education, are in part about exporting educational models, and opening new markets, it is also an important opportunity for us to learn from international models and internationalise educational models utilised here in Aberdeen. It is, however, essential that development of transnational projects be closely tied to the University’s mission, thus including significant research and educational opportunities and enhancement.

3.2 We are involved already in a number of initiatives to develop our transnational education strategy, e.g. the exploration of a medical school in Sri Lanka, a branch campus in South Korea and postgraduate research opportunities in Brazil.
## RESEARCH NETWORKS

### 4.1 Research, as a key part of our University mission, is also essential to successful internationalisation. Building higher-level partnerships and networks will enhance the quality and significance of our research. The key to maximising potential in this area is to build multi-layered partnerships with targeted institutions to leverage interdisciplinary synergies. Networks of universities and non-academic partners with similar research areas/needs (as for example those being built around Energy) will enable us to access significant resource opportunities as well as building networks of academics essential to modern research.

### 4.2 Our intention will be to promote and enhance the international relevance and impact of our research and knowledge transfer activities through:

- promoting the University’s capacity as an international research and knowledge transfer partner, by building on the strategic research themes to highlight and enhance our research in relation to global issues, i.e. research themes;
- promoting our research excellence in establishing and developing research areas; and
- increasing the portion of income funded by international organisations to include EU, ERC, Government and industrial funders.

### 4.3 We will grow our international research activities to support and enhance our strategic aspiration of being recognised for research and innovation of the highest international quality. In support of this, we will:

- continue to attract and collaborate with the best international researchers;
- increase awareness of, and engagement with, EU and other international research funds and funders;
- develop a more strategic approach to establishing international research partnerships (in line with the University’s financial forecasts);
- build upon our current relationships with major international research sponsors/funders and increase our participation in, and leadership of, international research collaborations; and
- explore the potential in joint research institutes and facilities with international research partners.

### 4.4 We have identified some immediate strategic goals:

- ensure we benefit from European Horizon 2020 funding;
- build capacity that follows on from current successes, e.g. Green Concrete (Qatar), Neurodegenerative Research & Development (Tau/Singapore), Energy (North and South America, China, South East Asia), Food Security, Maternal Health (Developing Countries); and
- promote staff mobility to enhance international relations to complement and develop our research themes;
- take advantage of external funding schemes and internal strategic investment.

## STAFF RECRUITMENT AND MOBILITY

### 5.1 The University has an extensive international staffing profile with employees from over 80 countries across the world. We will continue to embrace and celebrate the different cultural backgrounds of staff to strengthen our activities and develop a truly international academic community. The diverse nature of our workforce provides the foundation for a strong international strategy and brings additional perspectives to all our activities, whether staff recruitment, staff development or international research and teaching activities.
5.2 International staff mobility will be encouraged throughout the institution, both to support the University’s strategy and to enrich academic life. Staff mobility activities will be informed by appropriate market research identifying priority markets for partnership and collaboration arrangements. Staff mobility will be operationalised through new offshore ventures, collaboration agreements, partnerships, and individual research collaborations. In support of all of these aspirations we will:

- offer competitive remuneration and relocation packages;
- provide support and guidance to new international staff, specifically providing dedicated support on immigration matters to all migrant staff;
- take account of cultural requirements in delivery of our suite of development programmes for staff;
- develop an international awareness amongst all our staff and actively promote equality and diversity, including delivery of appropriate E&D training for all staff;
- support and celebrate staff contributions to the University’s internationalisation strategy;
- encourage staff to engage in international activities across the institution;
- provide support to junior staff to encourage networking and collaborations through focused communications; and
- identify and offer international opportunities for our professional services staff to inform and enhance our activities.

6 ALUMNI AND DONORS

6.1 Alumni provide a strong network of support that underpins the University's strategic aims. International alumni are a largely untapped asset and critical for the development of a cohesive international plan. International alumni, as champions of the University of Aberdeen, will be an important resource for achieving a variety of institutional goals. This ambassadorial role will impact positively on student recruitment, attraction of intellectual talent, and enhancement of fundraising, along with raising the profile of the University, international expansion programmes, and developing linkages with other universities and governments.

6.2 We currently have 23,000 overseas alumni in 172 countries to cultivate as champions for our University. We have particularly large numbers in Europe (9,000), North America (5,000), and Asia (3,500). The alumni office is recruiting international alumni ambassadors and has recently launched alumni chapters in both Boston and New York. Ongoing engagement will be balanced between current significant alumni hubs and smaller alumni hubs where recruitment needs are paramount.

6.3 We will engage consistently and effectively with our international students and their families throughout their studies so they are enthusiastic University champions upon graduation and are happy to remain engaged on an ongoing basis.

6.4 To achieve this, we will:

- develop additional international alumni chapters building on previous successes;
- develop a framework for international alumni networks;
- reinvigorate the ambassador programme and re-engage with existing ambassadors;
- develop a programme of student engagement working with the international office;
- engage with parents and families of international students to develop a sense of the "Aberdeen Family" in order to build relationships beyond graduation; and
- develop an international mentoring programme.

7 ENABLING DELIVERY OF THE STRATEGY

7.1 In order to deliver the strategy, an initial investment is required in relation to student recruitment, student experience and partnerships, in addition to current resource levels and capital investments. This will enable the recruitment of an additional Dean and eight staff to support the delivery of the strategy.
7.2 The aim is to grow current international student income from £8.7M in priority markets to £26M by 2019/20. Further investment will be required as the student numbers and partnerships increase, particularly in relation to academic support for the students to ensure we maintain staff/student ratios and hence the overall quality of the staff and student experience. From our current analysis, it can be assumed that for every £1M increase in income, we will need to spend around 75% (full cost basis) to support the new activity. However, of the 75%, 25%-30% relates to fixed costs which already exist to support our current activities, e.g. University infrastructure such as premises costs. Therefore, by 2019/20, the overall financial position of the University will have improved by £8M-£9M.

7.3 In addition, an initial budget, investment is required to establish the Aberdeen International Centre (see section 3 of the strategy). All transnational opportunities will be reviewed on an individual basis, with standalone business plans which will be subject to separate approval.
## Target Markets and Disciplines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target market</th>
<th>2012/13 UK Sector (FTE)</th>
<th>% of students by principal subject, in UK</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>74,000</td>
<td>Business (36.9%) Engineering (12%) Law (4.5%) Languages (3.9%: TESOL key for market)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US &amp; Canada</td>
<td>14,100</td>
<td>This market sees a more even spread across disciplines than others, hence a less focused approach on target programmes. Top areas are: Social Studies (15%) Historical &amp; philosophical studies (12%) Business (10%) Law (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>15,600</td>
<td>Business (25%) Engineering (16.5%) Law (9.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>22,800</td>
<td>Engineering (22%) Business (21%) Computer Science (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-East Asia</td>
<td>24,400</td>
<td>Business (22%) Engineering (15%) Law (11%)</td>
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