

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**  
**OUTCOME AGREEMENT 2015-2016**

**1. FOREWORD**

Since its earliest days over half a millennium ago, the University of Aberdeen has existed to support the needs of its region and nation. We remain as committed as ever to that mission and while the University today operates with a global perspective and reach, we do so because that enables us to deliver better for our students, for society and for the economy of Scotland. This Outcome Agreement sets out how, in partnership with the Scottish Funding Council and Scottish Government, we will meet that commitment to bring international excellence to support the achievement of Scotland's national priorities.

This is an exciting time for the University as we prepare to launch a new Strategic Plan for 2015-2020. This Outcome Agreement has been developed in parallel to our emerging strategic vision for the University and is structured around the same five core themes of:

- Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience
- Research
- People
- Internationalisation
- Underpinning Infrastructure

These themes are inherently inter-related. Providing our students with a world-class student experience and ensuring access to disadvantaged students from both urban and rural areas is at the core of our strategy and depends upon the excellence of our curriculum, our staff and the quality of our facilities.

We have already transformed our curriculum in partnership with students and employers to enable our graduates to be better equipped for the challenges of modern work and life, and invested significantly to recruit more world class scholars to Aberdeen. In addition to the quality of our teaching, this Outcome Agreement sets out our continuing commitment to widening access to the opportunities an education from Aberdeen offers, and outlines how we will continue to enhance the support that we offer to students once they are here so that, regardless of background, all students can realise their full potential.

A world-class student experience requires facilities to match. In recent years we have created wonderful new facilities like the Sir Duncan Rice Library and the Aberdeen Sports Village and Aquatics Centre, which are among some of the finest available to students in Europe. We intend to do much more, however, with £276M of further investment in our Estate planned for the next decade. Amongst other projects, we will build a new Energy Building to support teaching and research in a range of science and energy-related disciplines, a new Students' Association Building, and major improvements to the quality of teaching, departmental and student accommodation across our campuses.

These projects are all statements of our ambition for the future of the University which, given our record of success, we face with confidence. Our success is underpinned by our partnership with the Scottish Funding Council and the significant investment of public funding entrusted to us. This Outcome Agreement reflects our ambition to build on that record of achievement and to continue to deliver for Scotland the benefits of an internationally successful university.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond  
Principal and Vice-Chancellor

## **2 TEACHING, LEARNING AND THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

- 2.1 At the University of Aberdeen, we are committed to putting our students at the heart of everything we do. We aim to ensure that our graduates are better informed, more intellectually flexible, and better equipped to tackle the challenges of the 21st century. Our ethos of student-centred learning and greater student choice has been the underpinning principle behind a number of innovative changes across the University in recent years.
- 2.2 In 2010, our curriculum reform project, and the introduction of a co-curriculum, aimed to equip our students with an awareness and appreciation of ethical and moral issues, encouraging them to become active citizens and to have an understanding of their social and civic responsibilities as well as giving them opportunities for enhanced and broader study.
- 2.3 In 2011, the University's new £57m Sir Duncan Rice Library was opened. This facility is proving to be highly successful, offering students a wide range of spaces in which to study and collaborate, and catering to the needs of as broad a range of learners as possible. It includes Assistive Technology Booths, innovative Co-Labs, group study rooms, project rooms and silent study spaces. Our librarians also teach information literacy skills classes to support teaching and learning.
- 2.4 In May 2014, the Aberdeen Aquatics Centre, a £22m collaborative project between the University, Aberdeen City Council and sportscotland, opened to the public and is sited alongside the £28m Aberdeen Sports Village which opened in 2009. Together, these offer our students access to cutting-edge, Olympic-standard sporting facilities.
- 2.5 The summer of 2014, as well as seeing the graduation of the first cohort of students under our reformed curriculum, also saw the introduction of a more student-oriented mode of curriculum choice, which gives our students greater control over their curriculum and increased flexibility in their Learner Journey. We are already seeing different patterns of student module registration as a result, and in particular an increased take-up in language courses under our Enhanced Study options.
- 2.6 During academic year 2013-2014 we also rolled-out our new personal tutoring system, which offers all students dedicated pastoral support and encourages students to reflect on and discuss their progress throughout their studies, as well as our peer mentoring scheme which gives all students a named Peer Mentor to support them in their transition to the University.

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### **2.7 Access to higher education**

- 2.7.1 As part of our commitment to delivering a high-quality student experience, we remain committed to the recruitment of students solely on merit and on their potential to achieve.
- 2.7.2 Through our Widening Participation Working Group, chaired by the Vice-Principal for Teaching and Learning and including representation from across the University, we monitor the effectiveness of a number of widening participation activities, including:
- University of Aberdeen Summer School for Access
  - Access to Degree Studies programme
  - Articulation routes with local colleges
  - Participation in the REACH project
  - Aim4Uni project
  - Support of Care Leavers
  - S6 Enhancement activity

- 2.7.3 We are committed to making places available to learners articulating from FE colleges with advanced standing, and have articulation agreements in place with a number of colleges across Scotland. We plan to expand the range of articulation routes available to learners from partner colleges. For example, at Dundee and Angus College this expansion includes a consideration of Petroleum Engineering and Medical Sciences articulation routes and we are working actively with our partner colleges to identify scope for closer collaboration and an enhanced range of articulation opportunities for FE students.
- 2.7.4 We offer students at FE colleges the opportunity to spend time on-campus each year, to experience life as an HE student and to help smooth the transition from FE to HE. We also offer FE students the opportunity to take Associate Student status, which allows them access to our Library and sporting facilities.
- 2.7.5 We offer students on relevant articulation routes the opportunity to take online self-study units in subjects such as engineering and maths to help build their confidence and smooth their transition on to their HE courses.
- 2.7.6 In addition to using a contextualised admissions process, which takes account of a broader range of candidate attributes and ensures that admission is based entirely on merit and on an individual's ability to achieve, during the 2014-2015 admissions cycle (for entry in 2015-2016) we are introducing additional checks into the admissions process to ensure that candidates from protected characteristic groups, care leavers, students from the 20% and 40% most deprived postcodes and students from low progression schools are identified and given full consideration for admission.
- 2.7.7 In addition to our work with the ASPIRE North (SHEP) programme, we are also working locally with schools whose progression rates are, or may be in danger of, falling below a threshold of 25% or who have other identified barriers to progression into higher education, offering them support appropriate to their particular needs. This includes running the Aim4Uni project, through which we work with whole-group cohorts as well as individual students. We recently updated the list of schools supported through this project and will be increasing the number of target schools from eight to 14. This is based on data showing the average progression of all secondary schools within Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire over a three-year period from 2011 to 2014, with an upper limit of 25%. Schools identified via this process will get priority places for any activities which we undertake, including a significant number of activities in STEM subjects.
- 2.7.8 Our recruitment of students from MD40 backgrounds has been consistently significantly higher than would be proportionate to the population in our surrounding areas of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. While Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire between them contain only 4.7% of Scotland's MD40 postcodes by population, we have admitted between 12-16.2% of our Scottish undergraduate population from MD40 backgrounds over the last three years, and are aiming to admit 12.8% of our 2015/2016 intake from MD40 postcodes.
- 2.7.9 Following over-recruitment in 2011/2012 and, to a lesser extent, in 2012/2013 and necessary reductions in recruitment in the following two years to avoid consolidation breaches, our recruitment strategy for 2015/2016 onwards is intended to stabilise our overall population levels. We would anticipate that the percentage of students admitted from MD40 postcodes would therefore also stabilise at around 12-13% of our Scottish undergraduate admissions.
- 2.7.10 Through our Summer School programme, we offer students from low progression schools and the 20% and 40% most deprived postcodes an opportunity to experience life as a University student, as well as offering them an alternative route to access. In 2014, a new Summer School programme was launched which resulted in conversion rates of 95% for students from low progression schools, 94% for students for students from the 40% most deprived postcodes and 82% for students from the 20% most deprived postcodes. From 2014-2015 we will be monitoring the impacts of this new Summer School programme, including its effect on retention rates, social cohesion and achievement.

- 2.7.11 As a partner organisation in the REACH programme, we have a specific focus on encouraging access to high demand courses such as medicine and law. This programme targets secondary schools across the North and Highlands of Scotland whose progression rate is lower than 35% for entry into these programmes. This project includes workshops run in Aberdeen and Inverness for potential applicants to medicine that help them prepare for entrance interviews and practice tests as well as helping them prepare their applications and personal statements. For law, we have links with the Sheriff Courts in Aberdeen, Elgin and Inverness which allow potential applicants to visit the Courts to see 'a day in the running' of the Court and have question and answer sessions with the Sheriff and the Clerk.
- 2.7.12 Our Access to Degree Studies programme offers part-time (day-time or evening) and distance learning opportunities to mature students considering a return to education.
- 2.7.13 In support of those leaving care on entering higher education, we have a number of measures in place. We are currently applying for the Buttle Trust Quality Mark. We guarantee care leavers year-round accommodation for the duration of their degree programme and offer a single point of contact for any care leaver to contact with any queries or help that they may need. This contact is available from the earliest stages of considering higher education, through the application stage, throughout their studies and graduation and in preparing for graduate employment.
- 2.7.14 We are a member of STAF (Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum) which brings together all interested parties looking at care leavers across Scotland. Through membership of this Forum we ensure that our provision for care leavers is appropriate and that from applying to, or studying with, us they are given the best possible support.
- 2.7.15 Our S6 at Uni Enhancement activity sees a wide range of schools, including those with low progression rates into Higher Education, given the opportunity for pupils to undertake University courses via our MyAberdeen portal. Students using this system are able to access recorded lectures online, and then to join virtual or face-to-face weekly tutorials. They then have the opportunity to sit the same exam as our first year students. If these students take up a place at the University, they are given academic credit for the courses undertaken via this system.
- 2.7.16 We recognise the importance of raising aspirations among younger students and raising awareness among parents of routes into higher education. We are currently in discussions with the Children's University and are providing support for the coordination of an Aberdeen Children's University as a pilot for 2014-2015. The Children's University aims to foster an enjoyment in learning and so to raise aspirations. It targets pupils from ages seven to 14 and allows them to undertake a number of activities to build up a portfolio of learning, allowing them to 'graduate' at various levels. We have also agreed that we will organise and host the first Graduation Ceremony for the North-East of Scotland in June 2015. In addition, we are looking at a number of possible routes for developing other community-based programmes, for example we are in talks with Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust (AFCCT) about the possible development and delivery of sports- and non sports-related programmes.
- 2.7.17 The additional funded undergraduate and postgraduate taught places provided by SFC have been very successful, helping to develop critical mass in key strategic areas.
- 2.7.18 National Measures Addressed: 1, 2, 3, 4, 8**
- 2.7.19 Institutional Measures Addressed: a, b, c, d, e, n**

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## **2.8** *The learner journey*

- 2.8.1 The 2014-2015 academic year was the second year of implementation of our new personal tutoring system. This offers all students individualised support once they join the University to help smooth

the transition into higher education, help them realise their full potential, and to continue to address any barriers to retention or achievement that they may face. A key role for Personal Tutors is to encourage students to reflect on and discuss their academic progress throughout their studies. The system continues to 'bed-in' and adapt to meeting the changing needs of students, based on direct feedback to personal tutors and from a survey of tutees following the first year of implementation. In response to feedback from this academic year, student School Convenors will be invited to participate in all Senior Tutor meetings.

- 2.8.2 2014-2015 also saw our peer mentoring system Students for Students (S4S) expand, so that all new undergraduate students (first year or above) have a named Peer Mentor to support them in their transition to the University.
- 2.8.3 In November 2014, the Senate approved the establishment of a Retention Task Force. This group, whose membership represents our best performing and most challenged Schools in regard to retention rates, seeks to share and develop best practice and set improvement targets for individual Schools.
- 2.8.4 We also introduced a new common grading scale in 2014-2015. This aims to increase transparency in the assessment and feedback process, for both students and staff, particularly in regard to student progress.
- 2.8.5 Analysis of our data shows that we have an average retention rate for Scottish domiciled undergraduate 2013/2014 entrants moving in to the 2014/2015 academic year of 93.2% (1,061 students retained from an intake of 1,139). Allowing for our reduced intake in 2013/2014, this is the continuation of a steady upward trend and an overall improvement since 2009/2010 intake (and retention in to 2010/2011) of 1.6%.
- 2.8.6 Work is now being undertaken, under our new Retention Task Force, to carry out more detailed analysis by School and subject area as well as by a range of protected characteristics, to prioritise areas in which improvements to retention are required.
- 2.8.7 The first of these protected characteristics to be analysed, that of gender, shows a reassuringly even split of overall retention rates between the genders, with no clear trend in evidence between retention of male and female students, and an average difference over the last six years of less than 1 percent.
- 2.8.8 In September 2014, and originally initiated by the Students' Association, we changed the structure of our academic year to bring first half-session examinations to before the Christmas break and to ensure the inclusion of a structured revision period before all examination diets (including the resit diet). We are hopeful that these key changes will encourage students to seek any help required at an earlier stage, particularly those who may be struggling in the first term.
- 2.8.9 We continue to monitor closely our performance in both the National Student Survey and our Institutional Student Survey, and to develop measures to increase participation levels in both surveys to assist in gathering a more representative insight into the satisfaction level of our students.
- 2.8.10 Our Gaelic Language Plan has recently reached the end of the first year of implementation, and progress against the Plan has been reported to Bord na Gaidhlig. We are extremely pleased with progress made to date, and continue to regularly monitor achievement against targets agreed with Bord na Gaidhlig. In particular, we are monitoring uptake of places on Gaelic courses, including the Gaelic PGDE programmes, and are currently undertaking a targeted online marketing campaign for Gaelic programmes.
- 2.8.11 We are investigating options for expanding our provision of immersion activities for Gaelic speakers and learners of Gaelic and are looking into developing new measures which could be implemented to help build a broader community of Gaelic speakers within and outwith the University.

2.8.12 Following the ELIR assessment of the University during 2013, the University has received a Draft Outcome Report (January 2014) which states that the University has 'effective arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience' and that 'these arrangements are likely to continue to be effective in the future'.

2.8.13 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

**2.8.14 National Measures Addressed: 5, 6, 7**

**2.8.15 Institutional Measures Addressed: f, g, I**

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## **2.9 Employability**

2.9.1 Through our Employability Framework, we seek to ensure that all University of Aberdeen staff and students share a common understanding of employability in the context of both the formal academic curriculum and our innovative co-curriculum.

2.9.2 The Framework is based around five key strands:

- Aberdeen Graduate Attributes
- Curriculum Development
- Employer Engagement
- Co-Curricular Activities
- Career Planning

2.9.3 Strand 1, **Aberdeen Graduate Attributes**, aims to support a culture of Graduate Attribute engagement and development through:

- Raising student and staff awareness of the values, competencies and skills which are characterised through the Aberdeen Graduate Attributes
- Providing the online 'ACHIEVE' website to enable students to self-assess, reflect upon, and improve their development of Aberdeen Graduate Attributes
- Articulating the importance of Graduate Attributes to students at each study level through the Personal Tutor Scheme
- Using the externally-funded Higher Education Academy project, *Bringing Graduate Attributes to Life* and the resources developed through this project with academic Schools to contextualise Aberdeen Graduate Attributes

2.9.4 Strand 2, **Curriculum Development**, seeks to increase the visibility of employability in teaching, learning and assessment across the University. Employers have the opportunity to input into, and help shape, our curriculum and students have the opportunity to develop enterprise and entrepreneurial skills. Through our Teaching Fellows' Network, and through staff development activities and teaching development grants, we also encourage the dissemination of effective employability teaching and assessment practices.

- 2.9.5 Strand 3, **Employer Engagement**, focuses on raising the profile of the University and its capability in order to enhance links with employers and increase the number of employers contributing to the student experience through initiatives such as work placements and career mentoring.
- 2.9.6 Under Strand 4, **Co-Curricular Activities**, we are continuing to up-scale and enhance the STAR (Students Taking Active Roles) award and to raise the profile of co-curricular and student participation opportunities, including work placements, study abroad, enterprise and entrepreneurship initiatives and the Aberdeen Internship Programme. We are also enhancing and expanding the University's Career Mentoring Programme by working in partnership with a broad range of organisations, employers and professional bodies.
- 2.9.7 Strand 5, **Career Planning**, offers students the opportunity to explore their employment and further study options and to further develop their employability skills. This strand also helps to connect students to potential employers and gives them practical career planning resources in addition to traditional careers service provision. To supplement this activity, we are currently developing an online professional skills development course for students.
- 2.9.8 National Measures Addressed: 9**
- 2.9.9 Institutional Measures Addressed: h, o, q**

**Our Teaching, Learning and Student Experience Outcome Agreement Targets for 2015/16 are shown below**

**Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience – Targets:**

A summer School in 2015 targeted at students from deprived postcodes and low progression schools, as well as others who have encountered some clear educational deprivation

250 Scottish-domiciled entrants (including summer school participants) from the 40% most deprived postcodes to non-controlled subjects, equating to 12.8% of the projected Home/EU intake – an increase of 69 students over the confirmed final figures for the 2013/2014 academic year and an increase of 17 students over our 2014/2015 intake.

Continue to work with local schools identified through the SHEP programme, as well as a range of additional locally-identified schools with barriers to progression

60 entrants from target schools, equating to 3% of the projected Home/EU intake – an increase over the confirmed final figures for the 2013/2014 academic year (56) and 2014/2015 academic year (58).

Continue to support colleges with whom we have articulation agreements and continue to make articulation places available in line with demand

Further expansion of the range of articulation routes available to our FE partner colleges

First cohort of 10 students from Edinburgh College to articulate into programmes at the University of Aberdeen

We aim to maintain an average retention rate for Scottish-domiciled first year entrants returning to study in year two of 93%. By the end of the 2015/2016 academic year, we will also have carried out detailed analysis on retention rates for each protected characteristic group, and will have agreed mitigating actions for any groups for whom retention rates are routinely below our population average.

Increase of 5% in students completing the National Student Survey, against 2013/2014 completion rate of 67%, to meet or exceed the Scottish sector average

By 2015/16 we aim to improve the percentage of graduates in graduate employment or further study by 10% from our 2011/2012 baseline of 69%

Recruitment into STEM courses: target for 2015/2016 intake of 840 Home/EU entrants and 153 RUK entrants

### 3 RESEARCH

- 3.1 Following the release of the REF results in December 2014 we will continue to review and further develop our Strategic Plan research strategy including the identification of investment priorities and focus on our interdisciplinary research. We will also be reflecting on the subsequent announcement of Research Excellence Grant funding and will begin preparations for the next REF.
- 3.2 We are currently targeting an increase in postgraduate research student numbers through implementation of improved recruitment and admissions measures and institutional investment in our Elphinstone Studentships.
- 3.3 We are partners, along with the universities of Edinburgh and Strathclyde, in the £1.5m Enterprise Campus which is aimed at increasing and encouraging entrepreneurship in students. We hope to see the impact of that during the 2015/2016 academic year.
- 3.4 We are also targeting an overall increase in research income driven by new funding applications from strategic academic appointments made over the last 12 months and successful engagement with Horizon 2020. We are also looking to increase our level of engagement with research users, and with industry, commercial and public sector organisations.
- 3.5 We will continue to focus on excellence in research as the cornerstone of our strategy to underpin our position in national and international league tables, and we will continue to build on our position as a truly rounded University through our interdisciplinary research and teaching and learning initiatives such as our 6<sup>th</sup> Century Courses.
- 3.6 We are deeply committed to the development of our staff, including researchers, through activities such as the establishment of a Researcher Development Unit within the Centre for Academic Development, the provision of a range of training courses, and discussions with staff about their research ambitions at Annual Review. We wish to build upon these activities through our next Strategic Plan.
- 3.7 We will continue to invest in our underpinning research infrastructure (see also Infrastructure, page 15) and have put in place innovative organisational and physical structures to enhance and further facilitate interdisciplinarity, collaboration and support for Enterprise aligned to our key research strengths, such as the development of space aimed at accelerating knowledge transfer (for example an Innovation Corridor within the Polwarth Building on our Foresterhill campus), and the Innovation Hub to support start-ups from early career researchers and post graduates.
- 3.8 We continue to be active partners with industry, public sector bodies and other HE institutions, and remain committed to collaboration across the sector and with external partners. Our new Strategic Plan has partnership as its core theme, and this will underpin all of our future activity.
- 3.9 We undertake a broad range of public engagement, including activity aimed at public engagement with research. Further details of these activities can be found under People (pages 11-14).
- 3.10 We continue to refine and use key output measures, such as academic and non-academic impact, public engagement activities, and open access compliance.
- 3.11 The University is compliant with the UUK Concordat through our Research Governance Handbook. The Handbook is a high-level institutional document which sets out the standards, principles and expectations which underpin our approach to research governance. The document also outlines a number of key processes relating to areas such as research ethics, research conduct, peer review, governance and data management arrangements. All research staff and postgraduate research students are required to adhere to the Research Governance Handbook. The Handbook can be found online at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/research/research-ethics-and-governance-2778.php>.

**3.12 National Measures Addressed: 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18 (additional aim)**

**3.13 Institutional Measures Addressed: r, s, u, v, w**

**Our Research Outcome Agreement Targets for 2015/16 are shown below**

**Research – Targets:**

Growth in PGR student numbers to 900 from our 2014/2015 figure of 833.49 FTE

Increase in Research income to £70m from our 2013/2014 figure of £66m (set against a target for 2013/2014 of £61m)

Enhance our Peer review system to improve research income

Increase engagement with Innovation Centres and promote further to ensure we have a lead for each centre

Use of seed funding through various channels to promote and incentivise engagement to further enhance non-academic impact

Launch Enterprise Campus as component of Innovation Scotland and the Innovation Hub to support and grow enterprise and start-up activity

Continue to foster relationships with the TSB and the Catapult centres where these are aligned with our research strengths

Continue to promote the use of Innovation Vouchers and monitor their use – target of 20 Innovation Vouchers per annum, against our 2014/2015 target of 12

Ensure that follow on vouchers are utilised to strengthen relationships with SMEs – Target 25% conversion to Follow-on vouchers

Engage fully with Horizon 2020 and Implement our Operational Plan for EU Funding (which includes a key element of industrial engagement for EU opportunities)

**4.1 Our People**

- 4.1.1 'People' will form one of the main strands of the University's new Strategic Plan and is key to delivery of our institutional objectives. People are at the heart of everything we do. We view our staff, students, alumni and partners as members of the 'Aberdeen family' and aspire to develop the potential of each person to their maximum ability and to value the contribution of all of our partners. With more than 120 nationalities, our community is truly international and culturally diverse.
- 4.1.2 As a University, we are fully committed to creating an inclusive and tolerant University community. This includes creating a study and work environment which is free from prejudice, discrimination and harassment. Equality and Diversity training became mandatory for all staff in the second half of 2014, and the take-up of this training is being monitored. We have recently developed additional training around Unconscious Bias which will shortly be rolled out. We will undertake a Staff Equality and Diversity Questionnaire in 2015. We actively work to support the Aberdeen University Students' Association with its Equality and Diversity Priority Campaign and will soon be rolling out Equality and Diversity training for students.
- 4.1.3 In 2015/2016, we will be monitoring female representation at senior levels in STEM subjects and continuing to promote our Senior Women's Network to staff in all subjects, and will be looking to increase female representation within the undergraduate STEM population where appropriate. As partners in the ECU Attracting Diversity project, we are actively assessing the diversity and equality of our student populations, and addressing any areas of underrepresentation, as well as assessing the effectiveness of our recruitment and admissions processes.
- 4.1.4 Analysis of recruitment in to STEM subjects by gender shows that we are in line with the rest of the HE sector in having a greater proportion of female applicants and students taking subjects under Biological Sciences, and more male applicants and students taking subjects in our Engineering and Natural and Computing Science Schools. Similarly, our Education courses attract a higher proportion of female applicants and entrants.
- 4.1.5 Through our existing work with partner schools on STEM recruitment, we aim to raise aspirations of under-represented groups and increase applications to these subjects. Further analysis will be undertaken on both our STEM and Education recruitment data during 2015/2016 to identify, at a more granular level, possible barriers to participation from under-represented groups and to put in place activities designed to mitigate against these barriers.
- 4.1.6 We aim to achieve renewal of our Athena SWAN Institutional Bronze award and to achieve an Athena SWAN Silver award for the School of Medicine and Dentistry in 2015, and will be submitting applications for an Athena SWAN Bronze award in the School of Engineering and a Silver award in the School of Psychology.
- 4.1.7 We aim, in 2015/2016, to continue work begun on improving support for disabled staff, through improved training for line managers, active support of the Staff Disability Network Group and the launch of a mental health awareness campaign. Through our Student Support service, we offer active and comprehensive support to students with disabilities.
- 4.1.8 Through our Maternity and Paternity Leave Coaching we will continue to support all members of staff who are planning for maternity or paternity leave. This service helps staff to manage the transitions between work and leave, particularly planning for going on leave and planning for returning to work.
- 4.1.9 In 2015/2016 we are targeting an improvement of our score in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index and will continue to support our Staff LGBT Network Group and to work with the Students' Association in preparing a programme of events with its LGBT Society and forum.
- 4.1.10 In 2015/2016 we will participate in the Equality Challenge Unit Race Equality Charter Mark.

4.1.11 Our Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report for 2013-2015 can be found on our website at <http://bit.ly/11jhA6S>.

4.1.12 **National Measures Addressed: 8**

4.1.13 **Institutional Measures Addressed: i, l, t**

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## 4.2 *Cultural Contribution and Public Engagement*

4.2.1 In addition to our focus on supporting the staff, students, alumni and partners of the University, we are also proud of the role that we play in the cultural and economic fabric of Aberdeen, the North East of Scotland and beyond. Public, cultural and community engagement are embedded in our core business and help to enhance the University's research profile and internal and external reputation as well as enriching our external communities and our staff and student experience.

4.2.2 As an institution with over five centuries of historical standing, we have built a considerable archive of important cultural and historical assets, including our Special Collections Centre's repository of books, manuscripts, archives and photographs. Housed in climatically controlled facilities, the collections comprise over 200,000 rare printed books – including more than 4,000 16th century items – as well as 5,000 irreplaceable archival collections, with material dating as far back as the 3rd century BC. The collections cover all aspects of the history and culture of the University, the City of Aberdeen and the region as well as the relationship they enjoy with the wider world.

4.2.3 These resources, along with our extensive Museum collections, form the backbone of a vibrant public education and annual exhibition programme led by our Library and Special Collections University Museums teams. The use of our collections extends into our teaching and research activity and the establishment of our Aberdeen Humanities Fund seeks to exploit the cultural significance of our unique collections for learning, teaching and public engagement.

4.2.4 The University has a strong culture of innovation and has invested in dedicated, central support teams for cultural and public engagement. This serves to underpin our academic excellence and to enhance the student experience we offer, thereby contributing to student recruitment, retention and achievement. It also serves to showcase our research to a wider audience and to demonstrate its relevance to, and impact on, wider society.

4.2.5 The University's commitment to cultural engagement and leadership is evidenced through the wide and diverse range of events and activities that we run, and which engage with over 35,000 people each year. These include:

- A vibrant annual series of music, visual arts and literary events – many of which take place across venues in the city and further afield (see [www.abdn.ac.uk/events](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/events) for more details)
- A programme of events dedicated to human culture, advanced by our Elphinstone Institute ([www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone))
- The UK's largest community café discussion programme, modelled on the UK-wide Café Scientifique format ([www.engagingaberdeen.co.uk](http://www.engagingaberdeen.co.uk))
- The University of Aberdeen Annual May Festival – a high profile and innovative event showcasing the best cultural and research-led activity ([www.abdn.ac.uk/mayfestival](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/mayfestival))
- Research council-supported initiatives including the ESRC Festival of Social Science ([www.abdn.ac.uk/engage/foss](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/engage/foss)) and the AHRC Being Human Festival, which promoted engagement with researchers in the arts, social sciences and humanities ([www.abdn.ac.uk/engage/beinghuman](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/engage/beinghuman))
- Scotland's largest programme under the banner of the annual National Science and Engineering Week
- Membership of 'Aberdeen Festivals' collective and a significant support provided to four of Aberdeen's Festivals in addition to our own May Festival

- An extensive education and public programme led by our Library, Museums and Special Collections teams ([www.abdn.ac.uk/library](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/library))
- Weekly radio show with SHMU FM – a community radio station targeted at serving the city's seven priority regeneration areas with a focus on young people
- Our award-winning Public Engagement with Research effort to supporting community involvement in research creation ([www.abdn.ac.uk/engage](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/engage)), providing live opportunities for over 500 staff and students every year, and many more through printed and digital communications channels

4.2.6 As well as events led at institutional level, we also support and mentor student-led initiatives that fundamentally contribute to the cultural landscape of our region. These include our student festival, student societies, student-led publications such as Au magazine and The Gaudie, our undergraduate TEDx group and many others. We have in place schemes to reward and recognise staff and students in areas of cultural and public engagement. For staff these are outlined in our Framework of Academic Expectations and Annual Review and Promotions procedures, and for students via initiatives such as our STAR (Students Taking Active Roles) Awards scheme and the co-curricular elements of their student record.

4.2.7 We also have in place a range of incentives to empower our staff and students to help promote the university's cultural impact. These include our Enabling Funds to support public engagement projects and our Annual Principal's Prize for Public Engagement. We coordinate an annual training and development programme around science communication, exhibition planning and design, story-telling and other channels that help our staff and students advance cultural engagement. Our efforts in these areas have been recognised through shortlisting in two categories of the 2013 Times Higher Education Awards (Outstanding Contribution to the Local Community and Outstanding Support for Early Career Researchers) while our May Festival was shortlisted for a Scottish Events Award.

4.2.8 Partnership is also at the heart of our cultural engagement activity, and the university is connected into major city and regional events, including Aberdeen Museums and Galleries, the local Science Centre, Aberdeen Performing Arts and the local education authority. In 2012, the university hosted the British Science Festival, which brought 55,000 people in to the city to share in the culture and research of our institution across 6 days and 220 events.

4.2.9 Our commitment to cultural engagement also extends beyond our local region. We have a track record in international engagement, including two European Commission Framework projects for travelling exhibitions. More recently, the university led Scotland's first successful bid to the new European Commission Horizon 2020 fund. The bid was to stage a pan-Scotland public engagement Explorathon – part of European Researchers' Night. On 26 September 2014 the university coordinated simultaneous events in Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh in partnership with the universities of Glasgow, Strathclyde and Edinburgh. This brought 10,000 members of the public together with 330 researchers – the largest research-led public engagement initiative of its type in Scotland.

4.2.10 We continue to embed cultural and public engagement into our core activities and currently are exploring partnership as the driving theme to shaping the institution's strategic plan to 2020. Within this, engagement will underpin many areas as we continue to maximise the benefits of our activities for both our internal and external communities.

**4.2.11 National Measures Addressed: 17, 18 (additional aims)**

**Our People Outcome Agreement Targets for 2015/16 are shown below**

**People – Targets:**

Monitoring uptake of mandatory Equality and Diversity training

Rollout of Unconscious Bias training

Support of the AUSA Equality and Diversity Priority Campaign

Undertake Staff Equality and Diversity Questionnaire

Rollout Equality and Diversity training for students

Monitoring female representation at senior levels in STEM subjects

Undertake further analysis on STEM and Education recruitment data to identify barriers to participation from under-represented groups and put in place mitigating actions

Achieve Athena SWAN Institutional Bronze renewal

Achieve Athena SWAN Silver award in School of Medicine and Dentistry

Submit application for Athena SWAN Bronze award in School of Engineering

Submit application for Athena SWAN Silver award in School of Psychology

Improve support for disabled staff through line manager training

Develop a mental health awareness campaign

Improved score in Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index: in 2014/2015, we rose 66 places in the Index and we aim to see ongoing improvement year-on-year.

Prepare programme of events with AUSA's LGBT Society and forum

Participate in ECU's Race Equality Charter Mark

## 5 INTERNATIONALISATION

- 5.1 Internationalisation is a strand that will be embedded throughout our new Strategic Plan. Our Internationalisation Strategy covers all aspects of University activity, bringing an international dimension to research, teaching and administration.
- 5.2 Internationalisation is central to our research agenda, driving our competitiveness as an international research-driven university and enhancing our global reputation.
- 5.3 It is also key to our student experience. We have ambitious targets to increase our international student recruitment, which will create an even greater sense of cultural diversity for our students on campus, but we also aim to enable an increasing number of our students to have an overseas experience during their time with us. We believe that by providing our students with a truly international experience, both during their time in Aberdeen and through encouraging the take up of opportunities to have an overseas experience during their studies, we better equip our students as global citizens to embark upon further study or fulfilling careers upon graduation.
- 5.4 As well as our engagement in the Erasmus Programme, we work directly with a range of partner organisations to create a varied offering of overseas activities and international exchanges for our students to participate in, including opportunities for overseas volunteer work.
- 5.5 We recognise that some students will find it easier than others to take up such opportunities, and we actively look for ways to overcome barriers to participation. We have a number of support mechanisms to encourage students to consider overseas study, and to help find solutions to any barriers they may face, including a team of Go Abroad Ambassadors – recruited from students who have recently returned from overseas study/placement and who can offer guidance and peer mentoring to other students.
- 5.6 To further encourage students to consider taking up opportunities for an overseas experience as part of their learner journey, we have developed a number of shorter exchange programmes, including summer school exchanges and short, intensive programmes abroad and we work proactively, through our Go Abroad team, to source a wide range of different opportunities for students to take advantage of.
- 5.7 We also offer a number of Aberdeen-based opportunities for students to experience other cultures and languages, many of which form part of our sustained study options. As a result, and in part also due to the greater degree of student choice and curriculum control now being offered, we have seen an increase in 2014/2015 in the number of students taking optional language courses alongside their primary discipline. We expect to see further increases year-on-year.
- 5.8 We are in the process of establishing an overseas campus in South Korea and are actively exploring a number of other opportunities for transnational education. As well as the increased internationalisation offered by the establishment of such ventures, we aim to use these initiatives to bring additional benefits to our Aberdeen-based students, including increased opportunities for overseas internships, additional opportunities for overseas study and recruitment of a wider demographic of international students to our Aberdeen campuses.
- 5.9 In the development of these and other internationally-focused projects, we have forged, and continue to foster, a range of deep partnerships with key international stakeholders, bringing with them additional scope for increased student mobility, joint research opportunities and innovative, cutting-edge forms of teaching as well as sharing of best practice in university management and governance.
- 5.10 These projects also offer opportunities for increased staff mobility and new forms of staff exchange, in addition to the international exchange opportunities already on offer to staff and students. We view staff engagement through teaching, training and other overseas site visits as crucial to

developing stronger links with our partners, thereby allowing us to give better advice and guidance to students on the best international opportunities for them.

**5.11 Institutional Measures Addressed: k, p**

**Our Internationalisation Outcome Agreement Targets for 2015/16 are shown below**

**Internationalisation – Targets:**

Increase in the number of students taking language courses via our sustained study options: in 2014/2015, 82 students have registered to take two language modules each (one per semester) as required under our sustained study options. In 2015/2016 we aim to increase this number to 100.

In 2015/2016 we aim to further develop our recording and reporting mechanisms to better capture information on students having an overseas experience during their time with us, whether through overseas study, work, volunteering or other international experiences. We will use our network of Go Abroad Tutors to encourage all students to consider such opportunities. We will also use information gathered by these Tutors and our wider Go Abroad Team to gain a more in-depth understanding of the barriers to participation faced by our students and will put in place a number of actions to help address and overcome these barriers.

## 6 UNDERPINNING INFRASTRUCTURE

- 6.1 The realisation of our strategic ambitions is dependent on the quality and effectiveness of our underpinning infrastructure. We need a strong and efficient infrastructure which provides every member of our community with the opportunity to achieve and sustain success across all areas of activity and which provides a secure and stimulating environment in which to work and learn.
- 6.2 Our Estate is invaluable and is a physical representation of our University. It includes a range of historic, mid-20th Century and modern buildings used for diverse purposes and activities, each of which play an important part in defining the character of our University. The historic core of the Old Aberdeen campus is a major part of the city's cultural heritage, and we own a number of its most culturally important and distinguished buildings. Our campus at Foresterhill forms part of the modern University and in conjunction with NHS Grampian plays a large role in supporting the health needs of the community.
- 6.3 Our Estate presents opportunities to engage with the public alongside providing modern facilities for innovative learning and research. As such, it must meet the demands of the local community, students, and staff. Over the last decade we have invested significantly in developing and modernising our infrastructure and facilities, and this work continues as we plan for an expanding and increasingly diverse student and staff population. The University's recently approved 10 Year Capital Plan envisages investment of £276m over the period.
- 6.4 Through achievement of our previous Capital Plan, and our Estates Strategy 2013-2023, we have already enhanced the University campus through significant investment in the underpinning mechanisms for delivery of world-class teaching, learning and research and enhancement of our student and staff experience, such as our £57 million state-of-the-art Sir Duncan Rice Library, the Suttie Centre for Teaching and Learning in Healthcare, enhanced and expanded student accommodation provision and the Aberdeen Sports Village and Aquatics Centre.
- 6.5 Our current Plan includes the development of an innovative, cutting-edge PassivHaus nursery, a new flagship centre of excellence in energy research, innovation and teaching and the redevelopment and modernisation of teaching and learning spaces in the College of Arts and Social Sciences. In all new capital developments we aim to achieve BREEAM 'Excellent' ratings, with the Sir Duncan Rice Library and Suttie Centre nationally recognised and our new-build for the Rowett Institute for Nutrition and Health on course to achieve an 'Outstanding' rating, making it one of the first in the sector in Scotland to achieve that rating.
- 6.6 We balance our capital spending on refurbishing, renewing and replacing the existing estate with the delivery of new buildings to meet research, teaching and administrative needs. Current examples include: a new Rowett facility, the development of an Institute of Energy, and the co-location and refurbishment of our College of Arts and Social Sciences.
- 6.7 We are committed to undertaking Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) Progress Reporting as part of the Universities and Colleges Climate Commitment for Scotland framework. As part of that process we developed an institutional Carbon Management Plan. This is currently in the process of being revised and redeveloped. The current plan targets an ambitious 4% year-on-year carbon reduction with the Plan likely to have a similar target. We are also fully engaged as an active member of the EAUC, with involvement in appropriate Topic Support and other networks. While our focus to date has been on direct emissions from energy use, through the introduction of our new integrated management information system we will soon be able to start monitoring the University's business travel carbon footprint.
- 6.8 We are investigating collaborative opportunities for renewable energy generation, and looking at the possibility of using this new activity as partial carbon offsetting.

**6.9 National Measures Addressed: 15, 16**

**6.10 Institutional Measures Addressed: x, z**

**Our Underpinning Infrastructure Targets for 2015/16 are shown below**

**Underpinning** Infrastructure – Targets:

Overall reduction in carbon footprint – we aim to achieve a 4% year-on-year reduction, reflecting both international and Scottish Government targets

Annual capital and maintenance spend on estates and buildings at 4.5% of insured asset value

## Index by Theme

Strategic Theme	Pages	National Measures	Institutional Measures
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## Index by National/Institutional Measure

National/Institutional Measure		Strategic Theme	Page(s)
<b><i>Aim 1: Improve access to higher education for people from the widest possible range of backgrounds</i></b>			
1	The number and proportion of Scottish-domiciled learners articulating from college to degree-level courses with advanced standing	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	3, 8
2	The number and proportion of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants from the 20% and 40% most deprived postcodes	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	3, 8
3	The number and 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)	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	3, 8
4	(where under-represented) The number and proportion of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants by different protected characteristic groups and care leavers	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	3, 8
5	The number and proportion of full-time first year Scottish-domiciled entrants from different protected characteristic groups returning to study in year two	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	5, 8
a	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	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	2-5, 8
b	Steps taken by institutions to promote access to high demand courses such as medicine	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	4
c	Statement about how institutions recruit and support care leavers/young people in care	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	4
d	Evidence that institutions are maximising opportunities for guaranteed progression from partner colleges	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	2-3
e	Contribution that additional funded places for articulation and widening access will make to achieving institutional targets under Aim 1	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	4

<b>Aim 2: High quality, efficient and effective learning – learner journeys are short, efficient and effective as possible and learners experience the best possible quality of learning and teaching and achieve successful outcomes</b>			
6	The number and proportion of full-time first year Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants returning to study in year two	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	5, 8
7	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	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	5, 8
f	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	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	5
g	Statement of assurance that institution has achieved 'effectiveness' judgement in QAA enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) and is appropriately engaged in institution-led internal reviews (self-evaluation of quality)	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	6
<b>Aim 3: Right learning in the right place – secure coherent provision of higher education in Scotland in line with SFC's statutory obligation</b>			
8	The number and proportion of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants to STEM courses	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	8
		People	11, 14
h	Statement outlining how the institution is responding to evidence of current and future skills requirements of employers, as outlined in the Sector Skills Investment Plans and other available labour market information	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	6-7
i	Statement outlining what efforts the institution is making in relation to gender balance within their curriculum, e.g. STEM, nursing etc.	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	5
		People	11, 14
j	<i>Measure not applicable to the University of Aberdeen</i>		
k	Statement on steps being taken to grow the number of graduates with practical language skills	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	2, 5, 7
		Internationalisation	15-16
l	Statement outlining activities in support of the National Gaelic Language Plan	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	5
m	<i>Measure not applicable to the University of Aberdeen for 2015-2016</i>		
n	Contribution that additional funded places for undergraduate and/or taught postgraduate skills make to achieving institutional ambitions under aims 3 and/or 4	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	4
<b>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</b>			
9	The number and proportion of Scottish-domiciled graduates entering positive destinations	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	6-8
o	Evidence of provision of work related learning demonstrated by: providing baseline of current provision in relation to placements and expressing ambitions for growth; University strategy for enhancing skills development and skills utilisation, particularly relating to groups of students with statistically fewer chances to progress into graduate level work	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	6-7

<b>Aim 4 (continued)</b>			
P	Enhanced provision focused on internationalising the student experience demonstrated by providing baselines and expressing ambitions for growth in: opportunities to study abroad; tackling barriers, perceived and real, to students taking up the opportunities offered abroad	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	7
		Internationalisation	15-16
q	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)	Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience	6-8
<b>Aim 5: A research base that is internationally competitive and improving its reputation and standing in the world</b>			
10	Ratings of submissions to the Research Excellence Framework, relative to UK competitors	Research	9-10
11	Number of research postgraduate students	Research	9-10
12	Amount and percentage share (Scotland and UK) of income from the Research Councils, major research charities and the European Commission	Research	9-10
r	Statement outlining commitment to collaboration across the sector and with industry; ambitions and aspirations with respect to collaboration and the intended impact of these collaborative activities	Research	9
s	Statement of assurance that the institution has in place processes and structures to implement the principles and commitments in the Research Integrity Concordat	Research	9
t	Statement of ambition regarding Athena SWAN awards	People	11, 14
<b>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</b>			
13	Range of established Knowledge Transfer Grant (KTG) metrics and the Higher Education and Business Community Interaction Survey (HEBCI)	Research	9-10
14	The number of SFC innovation vouchers (IVs), Follow-on IVs and H2020 IVs	Research	9-10
u	Statement of ambition in this area, including commitment to the delivery of easy access IP; to engage actively with Interface; and to support the strategy of Innovation Scotland and its implementation	Research	9
v	Priorities and goals for engagement with SMEs – in particular through the vehicle of innovation vouchers (IV), Follow-on IVs and the upcoming H2020 IVs	Research	9-10
w	Plans and ambitions for: engagement with UK and European initiatives (e.g. TSB catapults); collaborating with Innovation Centres	Research	9-10

<b>Aim 7: Sustainable institutions – ensure high quality of governance and management for institutions delivering long-term and financial and environmentally sustainable interactions</b>			
15	Gross carbon footprint (3 year period)	Underpinning Infrastructure	17-18
16	Annual capital and maintenance spend on estates and buildings as a proportion of value of estate	Underpinning Infrastructure	17-18
x	Institutions should provide a narrative: outlining progress with their Climate Action Plan targets; describing their engagement with EAUC; evidencing their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions	Underpinning Infrastructure	17-18
y	<i>Measure not applicable to the University of Aberdeen</i>		
z	Statement on efforts to explore and exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness through collaboration and shared initiatives	Underpinning Infrastructure	17
<b>Additional aims: Culture and public policy development</b>			
17	Scotland's HEIs have a significant impact on the cultural life of Scotland and internationally. Though not obligatory, universities and SSIs may wish to reflect on this important role and their goals and aspirations towards increasing this contribution in their outcome agreement	People	12-13
18	Statement of ambition regarding public and cultural engagement and engaging with and contributing to public policy development and innovative public sector delivery	Research	9-10
		People	12-13