UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

INTERIM OUTCOME AND IMPACT FRAMEWORK

2020-2021

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1.   **INTRODUCTION**

The University of Aberdeen began 2020 in celebration, marking the 525th anniversary since its foundation, by launching Aberdeen 2040, a new University strategy for the next 20 years. Aberdeen 2040 is based on the University's foundational purpose of 1495: *Open to all and dedicated to the pursuit of truth in the service of others.* It highlights the ongoing importance of education and research as core institutional functions, and gives the foundational purpose modern context and continued resonance in the 21st century through four strategic themes, under which 20 major commitments are made, five for each theme. The themes are: Inclusive, Interdisciplinary, International and Sustainable. Over the coming years, the University's commitments under these themes, which also align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), will underpin all of its activities, from the education it delivers, to the research it undertakes.

With the onset of Covid-19 shortly after Aberdeen 2040 was launched, the areas it identified for strategic focus have grown in significance in the face of unprecedented challenges. For example, the importance of inclusion to education has been magnified and requires greater urgency; interdisciplinary research and solutions have and will be vital to addressing the many health, economic and societal problems now posed; and, sustainability has taken on new meaning, not least to people, services, governments, organisations, businesses and economies. However, despite the challenges we now collectively face, the University is confident that through Aberdeen 2040, it has the foundations in place to contribute effectively to the recovery within Scotland and beyond, both within the sector and across society more broadly, in the years that lie ahead.

It is against this backdrop that this Outcome and Impact Framework is written, at a time when the University, as with the sector at large, continues to work under emergency conditions forced by Covid-19, while in parallel, working to mitigate the adverse effects of Brexit on the sector. And while Aberdeen 2040 provides an internal framework to the University for its longer term contributions to recovery from the pandemic, this document outlines in detail a range of measures the University has and will take to mitigate the immediate and shorter-term impacts of Covid-19, with a focus on the priority areas identified by the SFC in the guidance document released in December 2020. These include: fair access and transitions; quality learning, teaching and participation; learning with impact; equalities and inclusion; high quality research and innovation; contributing to economic recovery and social renewal; and, addressing the climate emergency. Each of these areas is addressed in this document, in turn. It should also be noted at the outset that where applicable, the strategies, actions, standards and services taken forward and provided by the University to staff and students during the pandemic, have also applied to staff and students at the University's Qatar campus.

2.   **TACKLING COVID-19: UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS**

In March 2020, the University was one of the first in the sector to close its campus and revert to home and online working. At this time, it put in place a comprehensive set of governance arrangements to manage the Covid-19 crisis. It established a Covid-19 Campus Planning Group (CPG) which meets at least weekly to review changes in the external environment, and agree the institutional response to emerging guidance and legislation. This group reports directly into the University's Senior Management Team (SMT) which also meets at least twice per week.

The CPG is comprised of key stakeholders from the academic, professional services and student bodies, including Trade Union representation and elected members of the University's Senate. As well as coordinating the strategic response to the pandemic, the Group is on standby to convene at short notice to respond to critical incidents and agree actions arising from changes in both local and national circumstances. The CPG oversees compliance, reviews emerging risks associated with the pandemic, and provides strategic direction to a daily sub-group which is made up of representatives from HR, Health and Safety, Estates and Facilities, and Student Support. This latter group takes forward the operational implementation of actions, reporting back to the CPG alongside a Research sub-group and the Blended Learning Implementation Task and Finish Group (BLITFG). In relation to risk management, it should be noted that a comprehensive risk identification process was undertaken at the start of the pandemic, and risk management arrangements dedicated specifically to Covid-19 were put in place. A Covid-19 risk register was developed as part of that, and this has been managed closely by SMT since March 2020.

Communication plans are a standing item on the CPG agenda, with the issue of regular, real-time community-focussed updates to staff and students on changes to guidance. These communications also emphasise the need for compliance when appropriate, as well as highlighting the support available from the University, particularly in respect to health and wellbeing.

3. OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS

3.1. FAIR ACCESS AND TRANSITIONS

SFC Outcome: "Education is accessible to students of all backgrounds, and students are supported through successful pathways."

This section addresses each of the expectations outlined to universities by the SFC under the Fair Access and Transitions theme. It should be noted that, in relation the reduced Table of Measures and metrics relevant to this theme, the University has continued to perform well despite the pandemic. For the CoWA measure, which counts full-time first degree entrants from the 20% most deprived areas, in-year data currently shows that 7.8% of Scottish domiciled full-time first degree entrants in 2020/21 came from these areas, only a marginal drop from 8.6% in the previous year, with the year still in progress. Under Articulation, internal data shows that 34.3% of HN entrants from Scottish colleges came with Advanced Standing, up from 29.5% the year previous; albeit, these figures will be subject to revision on implementation of a new methodology for this metric, adopted by the SFC. However, regardless of methodology, a strong upward trajectory is clear. The University is confident that as the recovery from Covid-19 gathers pace, it will continue to perform strongly and improve in these areas.

People from deprived areas are supported to have fair access.

The University has a range of measures in place to ensure that people from deprived areas are supported to have fair access to study at Aberdeen. The most significant of these is outlined below:

- **The University has a robust set of contextualised admissions processes**, designed to enhance accessibility to Aberdeen, particularly to students from deprived backgrounds. Further information on this is available here. These processes ensure reduced entry tariffs to eligible applicants, and underpin the support offered to students pre-entry. This includes SIMD20 and SIMD40 applicants but also, given the challenges of the University's location, those in areas four to eight on the eight-point Urban Rural Scale. Those who meet contextualised admissions criteria are also supported via Access Aberdeen, which informs, supports and encourages young people to make appropriate post-school study choices.

- **For students going through an articulation route**, the University has an Access & Articulation Team which offers personalised individual guidance on subject choices, entrance requirements, completion of the UCAS application and on personal statements. The University put significant effort into moving these activities online in 2020, and while this was largely driven by the pandemic, it has allowed the University to reach some relatively remote areas more effectively than previously. Consequently, some of the activities will now be made available online as standard in future.

- **The University also created Articulate Aberdeen** in 2020-21, a new programme. This has been designed specifically to support students whilst in college but due to start the process of transitioning into the University.

- **The Access and Articulation Team also established an internship**, with a remit to create a Widening Access Student Forum which will inform a review of pre-entry support for articulating students. The intern will also develop new models to support widening access students pre-entry, through the Access Aberdeen programme.

- **Students from an SIMD20 area were offered free accommodation for their first year of study** for the fourth year running for 2020-21. In addition, widening access students are also eligible to apply for a range of entrance scholarships, up to the value of £4000 per annum. In response to Covid-19 the University also offered two new bursaries in 2020-21: the 525 Widening Access Entrance Bursary and Santander Universities IT Bursary.

- These schemes offered £525 to new (including articulating) students to allow them to move to Aberdeen or purchase IT equipment to support home study. In total almost 200 bursaries addressing immediate need were awarded in September and the schemes are being rolled out again for January starts.

- **Bespoke Support**: all applicants are offered bespoke support at all University pre-entry information and recruitment events. Support is also given to prospective students in secondary schools across the country. This includes providing guidance on making applications to UCAS, writing personal statements, and providing HE Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG), which not only provides advice on applying to Aberdeen but also, where appropriate, other pathways, such as articulation.

People with experience of care are supported to have fair access.

In addition to the range of support measures referenced above for widening access applicants, care leavers are guaranteed an offer of admission, providing they meet the contextualised entry requirements for non-controlled subject areas. Moreover, as a Corporate Parent, the University works closely with local organisations such as Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Councils, Who Cares Scotland and MCR Pathways to support care experienced students with an interest in university study. It is notable that despite the pandemic, the University maintained its recruitment level for this cohort of students, standing at 1.3% for two years in succession, to 2020/21.

Prior learning is taken into account in the student's journey.

As part of the University's contextualised admissions policy, prior learning is taken into account when considering all applications. Non-traditional qualifications are given recognition wherever possible; for example, if an applicant is a veteran and they have undertaken training or have prior experience that is relevant, then this is taken into account when considering their application. Similarly, where qualifications do not necessarily meet entry requirements, prior work experience and/or professional qualifications may be taken into account when considering an application.

Transitions and pathways for students are supported and signposted.

The University continues to work with partners from across Scotland, including schools, colleges and the Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP), to highlight the different pathways to University that are available, and to provide general support on careers and the UCAS process. A selection of these is highlighted below:

- **Online drop in sessions have been established** in response to Covid restrictions. These take place regularly, and are used to field questions and promote information regarding pathway opportunities. Efforts are also made to highlight different pathways into the University and higher education more generally, not only with partners, but across the wider sector.

- **In late 2020 the University delivered Articulation Week online**, which highlighted the different articulation pathways that are available for a range of University degree programmes. This also included an evening session aimed at school pupils, parents, carers and teachers.

- **The University has also updated its web pages** to provide more accessible on-demand information, with signposted links. This includes information on alternative pathways (articulation), funding support, contextualised admissions, and so forth. The new material also offers a series of presentations to support applicants (and their guardians/parents) in their decision-making.

- **The University also included with Reach (Access to High Demand Professions),** a new online introduction to law course supports skill development for transition to studying law.

- **The University created a new online orientation modules available to all students** as a consequence of Covid-19, but with dedicated content for widening access students. This replaced the short summer schools for widening access and articulating students which were not

able to run due to the pandemic. These modules have been highly successful, with enrolment figures which include: almost 7000 students signed up to the module "Who does what at the University"; just over 6000 signed up to "IT Library and Support"; and 5501 signed up to "Our Learning Systems", among others. These sign-ups represented significant increases on previous enrolments, when courses were offered on-campus only. These modules will now continue to be used in future years.

Institutions work with schools and local communities to support successful pathways for students.

As referred to above, the University works with both schools and colleges in relation to articulation, but also its Access Aberdeen programme. Under Access Aberdeen, the University provides young people with guidance on specific career and subject choices, information on University and subject specific events, support with UCAS applications and personal statements, and guidance on entry requirements via different entry routes. These are important support functions for school-levers and young people looking to make the step to University.

More broadly, the University has continued to engage with local schools across the North East and North of Scotland. This includes offering virtual visits and events, hosting schools on campus (pre-Covid), and organising events aimed at young people and their families. All teachers on a target mailing list were supplied with a package of information providing, amongst other documents, detailed contextualised admissions information, and information for S2 pupils onwards in guiding them to making course choices to support their HE aspirations.

In terms of Further Education, the University also continues to engage with both North East Scotland College (NESCOL) and Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) at its Aberdeen campus. This includes offering virtual visits and events, supporting their virtual events, hosting college staff and students on campus, delivering regular drop-in sessions for NESCOL students (both off (pre-COVID) and online) and subject specific activities.

This work is equality impact assessed.

Very early in the pandemic the BLITFG undertook an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on the implications of blended learning and remote working for students and staff. This has been reviewed regularly in consultation with the Staff Equality Networks, the AUSA Liberation Forums, and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee. Action taken as a result of this work has included, but is not limited to:

- **ASK sessions on disability** have taken place in relation to blended learning
- **A Winter Wellbeing Toolkit has been developed and launched.**
- **Food boxes, additional support and phone calls have been given to students** self-isolating in University accommodation
- **An accessibility Checklist has been developed and launched**, with guidance on captioning of lectures
- **There has been frequent review of student support mechanisms** and very regular updating of the Coronavirus Support web page
- **A 'No Detriment' policy** has been adopted in relation to assessment.
- **A Hardship Fund and the Digital Poverty Fund** has been extended and promoted.
- **A Workload Reduction Toolkit** has been developed and launched, in conjunction with the Parents and Carers Network

3.2. QUALITY LEARNING, TEACHING AND PARTICIPATION

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

People have the necessary meta skills and attributes to succeed.

The following outlines key steps the University has taken during the pandemic to ensure that all staff and students have been equipped with the necessary skills and attributes to continue the delivery of teaching and learning, to the requisite standards as expected, during the pandemic.

- **All staff and PhD students with teaching responsibilities** have been supported in the transition to blended learning with: overarching guidance, including the Key Principles of Blended Learning; online resources, such as Examples & Inspiration and Tools for Blended Learning; and, development opportunities, like the popular 'Designing & Tutoring Online' course.

- **Tailored training for Schools and guidance notes** on specific topics have also been provided, such as 'Encouraging Student Engagement & Managing Workloads'. Accessibility and inclusivity have been integral components of every element of the move to blended learning. Inclusion training and a checklist have also been given to staff.

- **To support and enable student engagement with blended learning**, students have been given support via a range of measures. This has included the provision of online orientation and induction materials, resources to help with the use of blended learning tools in the 'Toolkit' and a range of Online Learning Skills resources, such as 'Online Group and Team Work', in MyAberdeen, the University's Virtual Learning Environment.

- **The Student Learning Service's workshop programme** also now includes online interactive 'Get Motivated' and 'Getting the Most from your Recorded Lectures' in response to feedback.

There is quality online and repurposed blended learning.

In addition to the above, the University has also put extensive effort into ensuring that the quality of online and blended learning has been to the highest level possible, with repurposing and tailoring taking place where needed, as part of the transition required as a consequence of Covid-19. The following points highlight the range or activities undertaken and measures implemented to ensure that the transition has been successful.

- **In terms of governance**, the move to blended learning was managed and coordinated by a dedicated institutional Blended Learning Implementation Task and Finish Group (BLITFG). This Group oversaw a consultation process, decision making, implementation and then evaluation of all aspects of the work required to deliver and support blended learning. The Group reported to the University Committee on Teaching and Learning and from there to the University Senate. The Group included representation from all 12 Schools in the University, and the Schools themselves each had their own Task & Finish Group, to oversee and manage the process at that level. Going forward, changes to the University's committee structure to support Education have been approved by the Senate and will be implemented later in 2020-21, subject to further approval by the University Court. The new structure includes wider School representation on all committees building on the positive experience established through the working of BLITFG.

- **The University adopted an institutional approach** in transitioning to blended learning, seeking to ensure, where possible, that there was consistency across all Schools. Work has been informed by a set of Blended Learning Principles developed and approved by BLITFG which are underpinned by supporting guidance materials and toolkit information to support colleagues in developing their blended course materials (referenced above). Colleagues from the Centre for Academic Development were also assigned to each School Task & Finish Group (TFG) and they have worked closely with Schools to support and train staff for blended delivery, in line with these Principles.

- **Scottish Government and Public Health guidance** has informed the University's approach to blended learning. In particular, this was important for informing what was an appropriate level of on-campus teaching during the pandemic, when the government's physical distancing rules have allowed. The University sought to provide as much on-campus engagement for students as possible within health and safety guidelines. On the basis of two metre physical distancing, the University has been able to accommodate 19% of its usual on-campus delivery, when on-campus teaching has been permitted.

- **Engagement with students** has been a key feature of all work undertaken in moving to blended learning. There has been student engagement on BLITFG and regular weekly meetings have been held between the Vice-Principal (Education) and the AUSA Vice-President (Education), in addition to regular meetings with the wider group of AUSA School Conveners.

- **The University's Education-related policies were all reviewed** as part of the transition to blended learning, designed to ensure that they were aligned to a blended mode of delivery. Going forward, this work will inform a wider and more holistic Education policy review.

- **In terms of student assessments**, changes have been made as a consequence of Covid, with the University no longer being able to deliver formal on-campus exams. All alternative assessment arrangements established in response were approved by the University's Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) with changes also put to External Examiners for feedback. Assessment integrity has been an important area of focus. Guidance has been provided to Schools on designing alternative assessments, and sessions for academic staff have been held to provide opportunities to share good practice and discuss ways to ensure assessment integrity.

- **An evidence-based evaluation is being undertaken** for the University's move to blended learning (in progress as at January 2021). This is seeking feedback from both staff and students, and where possible or appropriate, this will inform enhancements to blended learning delivery for the rest of the academic year. The outcome of the evaluation will also be important in informing the University's post-Covid vision for Education.

- **Quality assurance has been a major focus** throughout the transition to blended learning. As noted above, revisions to assessment have been considered by our Quality Assurance Committee and, in addition to evaluation work, the University's Annual Course and Programme Reviews will be modified to seek explicit comment on blended learning delivery. Additionally, despite the Covid restrictions and home working, the University has successfully undertaken two Internal Teaching Reviews, with a further three planned for the second semester, to be confirmed.

Students are supported in their mental health and wellbeing.

The University included a major commitment to support the mental health and wellbeing of staff and students as a key priority in Aberdeen 2040, under the Inclusive theme. This represents a continuation of previous work, and was reflected operationally in 2020, with a wide range of additional support initiatives rolled out to students, to help deal with problems arising from the pandemic. Some of the main initiatives are summarised below.

- **The University moved all front-facing student services to entirely virtual delivery** where required, including 1-2-1 counselling; specialist and mental health mentoring; and all areas of frontline advice and support.

- **In-person support was given during the main registration period** in September 2020 – as permitted at that time by Scottish Government rules on physical distancing - for most services involved in this element of the student journey.

- **A new 24/7 student helpline was developed and introduced**, launching in advance of the winter break in 2020, and providing immediate out of hours access to counselling services and a separate information line.

- **Group workshops were developed through the counselling service** to provide more proactive support to those experiencing mental health problems such as anxiety, recognising that this may be a consequence of Covid.

- **Dedicated IT support has been offered to students with specific needs**, through the offer of laptops and enhanced access to the internet via dongles;

- **The support available in Halls of Residence was expanded** through additional staffing and longer hours of coverage.

- **New support arrangements were introduced** for students required to self-isolate as a result of Covid-19, providing proactive support calls to all students and staff entering self-isolation and, for those in halls, offering free grocery boxes. These initiatives were supported by a new online self-isolation toolkit, signposting students to activities and support functions.

- **The internal provision of specialist mentoring** (including mental health mentors) was expanded in 2020, with plans to increase the hours of support available to students in 2021.

- **Initial training on suicide prevention** was developed and undertaken within certain frontline teams, through the University's local regional partner SAMH. The University also worked with the Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) to roll out their support resources within the University community.

- **A Students for Students (S4S) peer mentoring scheme** for UG students, and informal peer support through social media was also provided for PGT students, with plans to develop this for PGT and PGR students

Students have their voice heard and valued, and influence their educational experience.

In 2020 the University continued its work in key areas related to the student voice, and wider issues relevant to the student experience. A number of examples are provided below, in addition to some of the examples included above. These have largely been delivered or put in place against the backdrop of Covid-19.

- **The Aberdeen Student Experience survey** was delivered in autumn 2020, with an aspect added that asked students to provide their views on the blended learning experience. This feedback on blended learning followed from an earlier survey undertaken in the Spring to seek views from students on the shift to online delivery following lockdown.

- **The University has run a number of Live Open Ask sessions** for students, allowing participants to ask questions both on specific topics, such as accessibility, as well as more general open forums with members of senior management.

- **Promotional materials for course feedback forms** have been rolled out, designed to encourage student feedback in the context of blended learning. The University wants to encourage responses to the course feedback forms to inform course coordinator efforts to enhance their individual courses.

- **The InForm feedback campaign** continues to grow and play an important role in providing an always on route for student feedback. In particular InForm Now allows students to ask questions on any aspect of their student experience.

- **As part of the AUSA/University Student Partnership Agreement (SPA)**, there is a focus on student feedback as part of ongoing enhancement around the student voice.

- **Through the University's Race Equality Strategy Group**, which includes student representation, a listening process is in place which has enabled race equality leads, including the Vice-Principal Education and a Head of School, to conduct student and staff-led conversations. A number of themes are emerging from these discussions which are informing the work of the Group.

3.3. LEARNING WITH IMPACT

SFC Outcome: *"Students are equipped to flourish in employment, further study and to lead fulfilling lives."*

In relation to the revised Table of Measures, it should be noted that in the new Graduate Outcomes survey results, which were released in 2020, 95.5% of respondents from the University of Aberdeen were in a positive destination – full time employment or further study – within 15 months of

graduating. In turn, 64.8% were in professional employment, meaning a graduate level position. These figures are consistent with the results produced by the former Destination of Leavers Higher Education (DLHE) survey, and are a good indicator of the value added by Aberdeen graduates to the economy, with their readiness for employment. The results released in 2020 will now become a baseline for future years.

Analysis and engagement: There is a good understanding of the needs of business and industry; and Scotland's economic recovery needs.

The University engages extensively with employers, local and national government, civic groups and other key stakeholders, to ensure that it continues to deliver curricula across its broad range of disciplines and degree programmes, that meet the needs of the economy. This has taken on added importance in light of Covid-19, both in terms of impacting the economic recovery at institutional level, but also in driving employability at the level of individual students. Some of the key means through which the University engages industry are given below.

- **The University has an Institutional Employer Board** and discipline-specific Programme Advisory Boards that involve a range of local, regional and national employers, along with other stakeholders. These groups provide insights into employment trends and employer requirements across a variety of sectors, and enable the University and individual disciplines to understand the requirements of business and the local economy. The insights and connections gained through these groups will add significant value as the University looks to contribute to the wider economic recovery.

- **The University is involved in multiple local and regional partnership groups**. These include: The Opportunity North East (ONE) Digital Partnership; the ONE Energy Transition Zone, with other institutions and local councils; Skills Development Scotland at discipline and institutional level; and, the Regional Learning and Skills Partnership with local and regional stakeholders. The University also has Regional Engagement Group with a remit that includes community engagement. The Group oversees the involvement of the University in the Aberdeen City Region Deal, Community Planning Aberdeen and the development of a Civic University Agreement. The University is also engaged in the Aberdeen Prospers Outcome Improvement Group, which links with external organisations to increase opportunities between educational organisations within the North East of Scotland. Collectively the University's involvement in groups like these provides vital linkage and understanding as to business and industry needs, and as above, this will be of real value when building back after Covid-19.

- **The University also proactively horizon scans** for emerging trends and new opportunities, though various working groups made up of professional service staff and academics from across multiple disciplines. These groups include a dedicated Horizon Scanning Group which focuses primarily on the local economy and potential opportunities for the University, as well as a Business Engagement Group which includes alumni from industry.

Delivering the right skills: There is a pipeline of appropriately skilled people for the labour market.

The University has worked extensively to ensure that its graduates continue to have the right set of skills for entry into the labour market, not just in the range of vocational degree programmes it offers, but across every subject and discipline. The following highlights areas that are key to ensuring this, both prior to and during the pandemic.

- **The University offers multiple vocational degree programmes and externally accredited provision** as well as courses across disciplines that provide work-based learning opportunities for students. These range from single short courses through to year-long industrial placements. Collectively such programmes and initiatives are fundamental to ensuring that the University produces graduates with the skills needed to meet the needs of the labour market. There are also various curriculum breadth course options on offer, especially in the early years of undergraduate degree programmes where students can choose a wide variety of courses outside of their core curriculum.

- **The University is widening its work-based activity provision**. It is currently (as at January 2021) starting work on an institutional mapping exercise to identify all existing work-based learning provision along with expected or current growth areas. Coupled to this, it is also providing contextualised skills provision at a discipline level whilst maintaining blended learning. The blended learning environment has also prompted the general development of skills training for both staff and students on digital literacy and communication in a blended world. More specifically in terms of skills provision relative to employer needs, in the highly vocational subjects like Medicine and Dentistry, training has been moved online to mirror how current professional practice is carried out, where possible.

- **Co-curricular activities designed to enhance employability** have also been the subject of focus since the start of the pandemic. The University has online training materials (Achieve for undergraduates and Achieve+ for postgraduates) that have been adapted and enhanced to respond to blended learning delivery. Various events and activities have been developed and maintained since the first lockdown started in March 2020; for example, an Employability Boost Award created by the University Careers and Employability Service. This first ran when many students had just completed their studies, with a view to supporting them during a time of great uncertainty. Its success means that it will continue into the future with several new Employability Boost Award events planned throughout each academic year.

There is appropriate provision to help people upskill and reskill.

The University has created a wide range of courses and activities geared towards upskilling and reskilling, in response to Covid-19. In doing so, the University engaged primarily with long-term University business and industry contacts. It has also sought to ensure that the options it has available reflect the different circumstances people are under. For example, some people have greater capacity for upskilling, while online learning will likely be a suitable mode of study for those working from home, furloughed or newly made redundant. With factors like this in mind, the University responded in the following ways to the Covid-19 lockdown:

- **Under On-demand Learning**, the University developed *Mindfulness to Sustain Resilience and Wellbeing during Covid-19,* created in direct response to the pandemic, acknowledging that people might be struggling with their mental health and wellbeing due to a number of possible factors; for example, isolation, uncertainty and a lack of control during lockdown. This course is offered free of charge, and as of January 2021, there were over 1,100 registered students.

- **Using "FutureLearn" Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)***,* the University has also established five courses, as listed below, noting the first two are available as 'always on' courses and can be joined at any time; the three 'Body' MOOCs are run at set points throughout the year. All MOOCs offered on the FutureLearn platform are also free, without charge.

  - Nutrition and Wellbeing
  - Walter Scott: The Man Behind the Monument
  - What is the Body?
  - What Drives the Body?
  - How Does the Body Use DNA as a Blueprint?

  The SFC Upskilling Fund has also underpinned development of a wide range of courses, with over 30 that have had registrations throughout the pandemic alone. In its use of the 2020-21 fund, the University has sought to build on demand for particular courses in 2019/20, and to design courses that address skills gaps identified in several national and regional reports. In doing this, the University has focused on flexible, online provision in key areas, like energy transition, health and wellbeing, digital skills, as well as leadership and management. The top five courses from 2019/20 are:

  - ILM Level 5 Certificate in Leadership and Management
  - Discovering Mindfulness
  - The Leadership Challenge
  - Decommissioning of Offshore Installations: Regulatory Aspects
  - Fintech and Big Data

- **Other areas of upskilling activity** in addition to those listed above include:

  - "Microcredentials" created through a stackable curriculum via the On-demand series of course options to allow a 'pick and mix' approach to study and re-skilling.
  - The provision of discounts to NHS staff and alumni if they choose to study at Aberdeen.
  - Free courses through the iDEA (digital and employability skills) course site.
  - Creation of an Isolation Toolkit to support our students but also publicly available.
  - The creation of January entry points for over one hundred postgraduate programmes, thereby giving students greater flexibility and more options when planning their studies post-Covid.

3.4. EQUALITIES AND INCLUSION

As already referenced, 'Inclusive' is one of the four major strategic themes which make up Aberdeen 2040. The University made five high-level commitments under this theme as part of the new strategy; more detail on this is available here. More broadly, the University has continued with a wide range of initiatives and activities under the equality and inclusion agenda over the course of 2020 and into this calendar year. These include, but are not limited to:

- **The University has an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee**, chaired by the Senior Vice-Principal, which oversees all work related to equality, diversity and inclusion, including the approval of equality impact assessments.
- **A new training module** on equality, diversity and impact is due to be rolled out in the early part of 2021.
- **The University has now signed up to Race Equality Charter**.
- **A new Race Equality Strategy is to be developed by September 2021**
- **A Transgender Equality Policy for Staff and Students has been approved.**
- **The University celebrated Disability History Month** over November to December in 2020, with staff profiles in the e-zine and through student social media channels
- **The University has a number of staff networks in place to support a range of groups**. These include: Parents and Carers; LGBT+; Race Equality (established in 2020); Disability; and, Women's Development. All of these groups, and more, contributed to supporting staff through pandemic.
- **The University joined WHEN (Women in Higher Education Network) in 2020** – extensive consideration of the report 'Sharing the Caring' launched in response to pandemic with a range of recommendations
- **Under Athena Swan, the School of Psychology achieved the Silver Award**, the first School within the University to achieve it.

4. OUTCOMES FOR RESEARCH - HIGH QUALITY RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

SFC Outcomes: "Research Excellence" and "Research Sustainability".

4.1. RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

Institutions produce excellent research outputs.

The following are examples of key activities and processes the University has in place to underpin the production of excellent research outputs across the breadth of its research portfolio.

- **Researchers are proactively encouraged and supported** to apply for peer reviewed and competitive research funding.
- **The internal peer review of grant applications** is compulsory for applications to some funders and recommended for others. Support is also given for rebuttals.
- **The University encourages peer review of research outputs pre-publication**.
- **Encouragement is given to the publication of outputs in high quality, peer reviewed journals** or high quality publishers.

- **A structured programme of support and staff development** is in place to assure the quality of research at all stages throughout the research life cycle.
- **Support is provided on open access, copyright and other publication issues** through a Scholarly Communications Unit.
- **There is a process for early intervention with supportive feedback** on research concepts and ideas.
- **An internal grant is in place - the Research Enhancement Scheme** - to support additional work required or recommended by peer reviewers to improve the quality of applications where may have been highly rated, but were ultimately not funded.

Research impact reaches beyond academia.

The following outlines measures in place to help ensure that research impact goes beyond academic impact; that is broad in both nature and scope.

- **There is a clear focus on enhancing the University's institutional response to external funders' grand challenges** by supporting interdisciplinary research through the institutional research themes identified as part of Aberdeen 2040. These are all areas where the University seeks to deliver substantive non-academic impact over the coming decades and beyond. The University is currently recruiting interdisciplinary research themes leads to progress the priority areas set out in the 2040 strategy.
- **There is priority focus on developing research projects that lead to impactful outcomes**. This includes support for researchers who want to ensure impact outside academia through co-creation of research, partnership working and stakeholder engagement. During the pandemic, this has included developing projects and undertaking research to address problems arising from Covid.
- **Dedicated staff are in place to enable and support impactful research beyond academia,** within the University's Directorate of Research & Innovation.
- **Pump priming funds are available internally** to enable engagement on research, to facilitate knowledge exchange and in turn, to generate impactful outcomes.
- **There is extensive engagement with funding programmes that focus on impact**, including the Global Challenges Research Fund, Innovate UK, and partnership working under the aegis of the Aberdeen City Region Deal (more detail below). Pump priming grants are also available to explore GCRF opportunities.

The research environment supports excellence and impact.

The following are a range of initiatives and measures in place University-wide to underpin a research environment that supports and facilities both excellent and impactful research.

- **There has been ongoing investment in research capacity** across the University during 2020, with investment in a number of new posts. These appointments were made with a view to strengthening the University's capacity to deliver interdisciplinary research under the five priority research themes identified in Aberdeen 2040. In relation, it is also notable that despite the pandemic, REF eligibility numbers also increased by 14% during 2020.

- **The Grants Academy and Researcher Development Unit** work together to deliver an induction programme to all new academic staff. This includes providing development and networking opportunities, and raising awareness of funding priorities and funding programmes. The development of networks, internally as well as externally, is considered key to enabling participation in challenge-based interdisciplinary research programmes.

- **At the early career stages, new staff intakes have added more diversity** to the researcher community in terms of gender and ethnicity. The University has clear aims through voluntary instruments like Athena Swan and the Race Equality Charter, to establish a research environment that is diverse, free of discrimination and bias, where all researchers can achieve their potential.

- **The University has in place a staff development programme that supports all researchers** at all career stages. This includes postdoctoral and early career researchers, through to senior researchers and Principal Investigators. Different services and programmes are on offer to staff at differing levels, with all training delivered via the Researcher Development Team and The Grants Academy.

- **The University has a Framework of Academic Expectations** which articulates clearly its expectations of all academic staff. During the pandemic, the University instructed line managers to adjust these expectations in relation to research, taking into account heavier teaching and administrative loads, and general pressures which may be added as a consequence of working from home.

- **The University introduced a new institutional framework for research leave** in 2018. This was amended in 2020 to enable Heads of School and School Directors of Research to consider applications for leave from researchers who wish to prioritise their research focus after periods of absence or equivalence, due to a range of potential reasons, including; family related reasons, longer periods of ill health or after undergoing sustained periods of heavy teaching or administration work as a consequence of the pandemic.

- **The University has also established a short-term working group on research culture**, with a view to ensuring best practice in creating an enabling, respectful and supportive research environment. The group is taking this forward with a focus on work published by the Wellcome Trust, UKRI and the Royal Society

4.2. RESEARCH SUSTAINABILITY

- **The University became a signatory of the revised Researcher Development Concordat in July 2020**, and fully supports the principles within. The University is committed to ensuring that its research culture is creative, innovative, collaborative and supportive, placing inclusiveness at its heart and recognising the vital role research staff play. The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers provides a framework to focus work to ensure the University continues to push boundaries in the way it supports research careers both internally and across the HE sector. A Concordat Steering Group has also been established to oversee the development and implementation of a Concordat Action Plan, that ensures the views of research staff are incorporated.

- **The University has worked to ensure that PGR students are well supported** during the pandemic. In June 2020 it launched the "Minimising the Impact of Covid-19 on Research Degrees" policy, developed following a survey of students on the impact of Covid on their research progression. The policy included a range of measures to support and make allowances for students who had (and continue to have) significant disruption to their research progression. This was followed by a later survey in November 2020, with a third survey to be issued in 2021. Intelligence gathered in these subsequent surveys have and will influence any new or amended measures taken be the University to support affected PGRs. As an example, measures in place include additional funding to enable extensions for those students unable to mitigate against the disruption caused.

- **PGR students, like the student population more broadly, are also well supported by University teams providing wellbeing, mental health and counselling advice**.

- **PGR training has been adapted and is delivered online**, ensuring all students have access regardless of their location or mode of study. A suite of toolkits has been developed to focus on resilience, productivity and employability.

- **The University also continues to work collaboratively across Scotland** via the Researcher Development Training Sub-committee, ensuring policies and practices are underpinned by shared guiding principles.

5. **CONTRIBUTING TO ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND SOCIAL RENEWAL**

The following provides a direct response to the questions set by the SFC (see page 11 of the SFC guidance) on how the University is and will contribute to both economic recovery and social renewal following Covid-19. Note, this excludes the first question, which relates to stakeholder engagement to ensure that provision meets industry needs; this is addressed in detail above under 2.3.

Shifting provision to meet employer and industry needs short-term and longer-term.

The University is constantly reviewing its provision to ensure that it reflects changes to the wider economy and shifts in employer needs. For example, following the 2014 crash in oil and gas prices, and with the growing focus on renewable energy, the University pivoted to offer more programmes which focus on sustainable energy and on energy transition. This is reflected in the Aberdeen 2040 strategy, where *Energy Transition* has been identified as a major interdisciplinary challenge which the University will work to address in the coming years. In terms of impacts arising from Covid-19 on University provision and employer needs, the University has focused on a number of areas, but particularly disciplines linked to energy, health and digital, as follows:

- **In terms of energy**, the North-East of Scotland has been affected both by Covid-19 and a knock-on decrease in hydrocarbon prices and exploration, resulting in 43% of oil and gas workers being made redundant or furloughed since March 2020. The energy transition to renewables has thus been accelerated during this period and consequently, the University has made more energy transition courses available to individuals wishing to reskill or upskill in what is a rapidly changing sector.

- **With a focus on health**, the University has also made short courses in public health, epidemiology, nutrition and wellbeing available, noting these disciplines came to the forefront in responding to the pandemic. Under the 2020-21 Upskilling Fund, individuals already working in the health sector, particularly key workers, could apply for funded places on these courses, if wishing to add to their skillsets. There was also a trend of people in other sectors, often those affected by the pandemic, such as hospitality, applying for these courses in an effort to reskill and transition into more stable field of work.

- **Digital and data skills** have also been identified as areas with significant skills shortages, both nationally and regionally. As with Energy Transition, this recognition is reflected in Aberdeen 2040, where "Data and Artificial Intelligence" has been identified as a major interdisciplinary theme, to be addressed in the years ahead. As a first step, in-part in response to Covid-19, the University has made short, flexible courses in digital and data skills available. Moreover, in 2021, the University also intends to disaggregate degree programmes in data science and cybersecurity to make short, flexible courses available for upskilling and reskilling purposes.

Supporting different groups: those recently unemployed, those at risk of employment, and those seeking to return to the workplace after a period of absence.

In disbursing the Upskilling Fund, the University has and continues to support those who have become unemployed due to Covid-19, those at risk of redundancy in the near future, those wishing to return to the workforce after a break, and those looking to upskill or reskill, having been in the workforce for a few years. On this basis, the University is not necessarily looking to support young people who have recently graduated, as they have been 'skilled' relatively recently. There are a number of initiatives the University is taking forward, but as examples:

- **Activities to link with the Kickstart Scheme**, which supports people who are currently on Universal Credit to gain work experience and get back into the world of work.

- **Moving the Access Summer School** to fully online delivery to enhance routes into degree programmes for those students who require a supported transition into their university studies at undergraduate level. This will cater for those entering via alternative routes like articulation, but it will also be extremely beneficial to those who have not been involved in formal education for some time; for example, people who are recently unemployed following years in the workforce, looking to upskill by entering Higher Education.

- **The University has also created ABDN Connect and ABDN Community Connect**, to support work-based opportunities to help students gain part-time work, thereby adding to their preparedness for entering the workforce. ABDN Connect is open to all students and ABDN Community Connect is for students who wish to work with local charity organisations and community groups, with both schemes providing a stipend to allow them to participate in a work-based opportunity that they might not otherwise be able to do because of financial constraints.

Managing work-based learning and practical aspects of course provision, ensuring students are prepared for the workplace, despite ongoing constraints during this year.

Adding to points made above under 3.3, the University has been able to maintain its work-based learning provision, despite challenges posed by the pandemic. There were almost no losses in work-based learning or placements during the first semester of 2020-21, with the vast majority of activities moving to online delivery, and some being maintained in-person depending on the nature of the work being undertaken. This is especially the case for healthcare programmes, where bespoke arrangements for examinations and practical exams have been sought to allow these programmes to meet professional accreditation requirements. Other key points are noted below:

- **The University has delivered as much face-to-face teaching as possible**, especially for courses with a practical component. Work-based learning opportunities such as practical laboratory skills in-person and field work activities have been supported through blended online content that has also been provided to those studying at distance. This includes remote staff participating in on campus classes.

- **The proliferation of flexible short courses has been successful**, notably with working professionals who are able to apply their learning immediately to their work. This mode of study is particularly suitable for this type of experiential learning.

- **The University has supported students on apprenticeships programmes**, such as Graduate Apprenticeships, who have been made redundant. This has involved creating an internal opportunity for them to remain in employment and continue with their studies.

- **IT provision has been used to train students in key skills**, with steps taken to ensure that equipment is available and delivered to students where needed, including laptops and Wi-Fi dongles. This has been important in many cases to ensure access learning content.

Maintaining the quality of the student learning experience and monitoring student engagement with their programme of study.

The quality of the student learning experience has been at the heart of the University's overall approach to the development of blended learning in the context of Covid-19. Coupled to this, robust monitoring of student engagement, taken as a proxy for student satisfaction in their learning experience, has also been a major priority. While there are a number of aspects to each of these areas, some of which have been referenced in other sections, the following outlines approaches taken by the University in relative detail.

- **In terms of governance**, the University Committee for Teaching and Learning and its associated sub-committees (particularly the Quality Assurance Committee) have overall responsibility for quality (with ultimate reporting into Senate). In addition, the Blended Learning Implementation Task and Finish Group (BLITFG) (as sub-group of UCTL) has taken the leadership in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of blended learning.

- **Quality assurance processes,** as outlined above, have been at the centre of all work undertaken to make the transition to blended learning, with a firm emphasis on ensuring that the quality of education delivered is maintained and enhanced, and that the student experience, while significantly different, has nonetheless been optimised. The usual university QA processes are in place for blended learning as they would have been, with some additional opportunities to focus on the particularities of blended learning. These processes include: Course Feedback

Forms (for the ongoing evaluation of individual courses, the feedback from which course co-ordinators can use to make enhancements); Student Staff Liaison Committees where students have been able to provide ongoing feedback within their Schools or disciplines; Annual Course Review and Annual Programme Review which enable robust examination of the implementation of blended learning.

- **A response model and a commitment to partnership working** was established in the first half of 2020-21, designed to manage responses to the implementation of blended learning. This has given the University the ability to respond in an agile and rapid way to any issues that have emerged. In addition, this approach has allowed the University to embed learning from the first semester into plans for the second half session, so as to enhance the quality of the learning experience in both real time and for future course delivery.

- **There has also been significant support at School level**. The School Task and Finish Groups, linked directly to BLITFG (referenced above), have had support from allocated project managers and colleagues from our Centre for Academic Development. This has allowed Schools to focus on key areas where support has been needed, such bespoke training for staff, and access to digital resources for delivery of teaching. Alongside these formal School groups, the VP Education and the Director of Academic Services and Online Education have met with the School BLITFG leads twice per week so that issues and good practice could be identified quickly. These meetings have allowed issues to be quickly resolved, thus enhancing the quality of the learning experience.

- **Upward feedback from students** has also been a key feature of arrangements in place. The Vice-President Education for the Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) is a member of the Vice-Principal's Education Team and attends all meetings, is consulted on all areas, and brings in other students to support discussions on decisions about blended learning. He meets with the VP Education on at least a weekly basis so that operational issues can be discussed and managed quickly. In addition, the VP Education meets with the Student School Convenors on a monthly basis gaining feedback on the experience of blended learning which then feeds into the ongoing work to support the real time improvements, and enhancements for the second semester. More generally, students are able to provide feedback at any time through the University's InForm system and a coronavirus email, both of which have been used well by students since March 2020.

- **Evaluation of blended learning** has been taking place in 'real-time', combined with approaches for longer term evaluation. These have been designed to do three things: firstly to respond quickly to operational issues that may need to be sorted out for students; secondly to inform the way in which blended learning will be implemented in the second term; and thirdly, to identify good practice that can be shared and possibly implemented more widely across the university to increase the quality of the learning experience. It is also notable that a 'pulse' survey was also undertaken in November which aimed to understand how the blended learning experience was going. Almost 2000 students responded with 82% stating that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the experience of blended learning. A number of areas were helpfully identified as areas for improvement including the need for us to further develop our approaches to enabling student engagement in both the online and on campus environment.

- **The University monitors the student engagement** and has a range of initiatives to improve retention and the wider student experience. In terms of retention, internal data shows that in 2020-21, 96.5% of Scottish-domiciled full-time first year entrants who enrolled in 2019-20, returned to study in year two. This represents the fifth year in succession that the University improved its performance under this metric, even more impressive given the ongoing impacts of Covid-19. While many of the measures in place to support students are articulated in other sections, above, it is worth noting that one key priority for the University has been ensuring that both staff and students could easily access the information that would provide support to them in their specific circumstances. To that end, an interactive document was produced that allowed students to easily access information about support for different issues; for example finance problems, digital requirements, or counselling services.

In terms of learning, there is a university-wide approach to monitoring engagement. The University has maintained this approach and introduced some flexibility to enable students to continue to have access to their online learning resources alongside an intervention so that they can identify whether there are issues or concerns that can be addressed with central support. This is complemented by pastoral support provided in Schools for personal tutors for UG students and PGT leads, with these systems again adapted for blended learning.

Universities are focussing and prioritising their knowledge exchange and innovation activity on Scotland's recovery.

The University has taken a number of steps to ensure that it has re-focused its knowledge exchange and innovation activities, where possible, to ensure that support for recovery from pandemic has been prioritised, both locally and across the United Kingdom more broadly. Some examples are given below.

- **The University has taken forward a number of projects that are specifically aimed at addressing issues arising from the pandemic**, and in turn supporting recovery from it. This has been done largely through the University's portfolio of externally funded projects. This has included, as an example, funding to explore the impact of Covid on service change and health inequalities.

- **The University has supported spin outs and start-ups** with which it will collaborate going forward, by providing prioritised access to laboratories whenever lockdown or social distancing measures allow.

- **Funding has been allocated to support student entrepreneurs and start-ups**. This has been done through the University's summer accelerator support and a hardship fund for start-ups.

- **The University has also been working with Opportunity North East**, with a primary focus on the innovation themes linked to Aberdeen City Region Deal. There are a number of examples of work here, including: under energy transition, a University theme under Aberdeen 2040, building the external focus by responding to external network's calls for assistance, include AREG, NECCUS and the COP26 Universities Network; responding to the regional development plans for an Energy Transition Zone in Aberdeen; and, leading on UIF collaborative activity by collating energy transition expertise across Scottish Universities.

- **Work has been undertaken to expand engagement and responsiveness with companies**, with a view to providing access to university expertise and facilities.

- **The capability of the National Decommissioning Centre has been expanded this year** through the launch of the "Introduction to Offshore Decommissioning" course, which is accredited by the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB). This was delivered online.

- **The University has collaborated with ONE, NHS Grampian and Robert Gordon University** to create of the Triple Helix Group, which focuses on responding to challenges from the NHS, particularly those linked to AI and digital solutions.

6. **ADDRESSING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY**

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

Aberdeen 2040 places the sustainability agenda at the heart of institutional strategy; as already referenced, sustainability is one of the four strategic themes identified within the University's 20 year vision. Under this theme, as with the other three, the University made five explicit, high-level commitments, to be delivered over the coming years. These reflect key areas within the general sustainability agenda, including the implementation of best practice in sustainability at an operational

level, the sustainability literacy of staff and students, the role of the University in supporting and leading energy transition efforts, and a drive to become carbon neutral before 2040. There is also work ongoing to support the United Nations' Sustainability Development Goals. Despite the significant challenges arising from Covid-19, the University took a decision to maintain its impetus on sustainability throughout 2020. Key steps taken thus far are outlined below:

- **A reappraisal of governance structures to support the sustainability agenda** took place at institutional level. As a consequence, sustainability issues are now overseen by a Sustainability Steering Group which is chaired by the Senior Vice-Principal (SVP) and which reports through the University's Policy & Resources Committee to the University Court. As well as the SVP, it includes the four Vice-Principals, representation from Professional Services sections (Estates & Facilities, Finance, Research & Innovation, People and Planning), functional leads, students and trade unions.

- **A strategy to deliver carbon neutrality before 2040 is under development; this is** a key commitment made in Aberdeen 2040. This work includes establishing a baseline for emissions across its three local campuses, and working with its partners in Qatar to understand emissions on that site. An implementation plan will also be developed to support this commitment. The University intends to adopt a comprehensive approach across direct and indirect emissions, and will, wherever possible, work alongside other public bodies to share best practice and understanding, with a particular focus on how to collectively address 'hard to tackle' Scope 3 emissions. In support of its net-zero commitment, the University has also signed the Global Climate Letter and the One Planet Pledge, while the work of NUS/SOS-UK in collating information on the sector response to net-zero has ranked Aberdeen among the group of institutions with the most ambitious and challenging net-zero commitments.

- **The University has signed the SDG Accord**, submitting its first SDG report as part of that exercise in June 2020. The University's performance against the SDGs will again be measured in 2021 through the Times Higher Education (THE) 'Impact' rankings, which the University has entered for a third time. The University sees the SDGs as a vital framework against which to articulate its academic and operational contributions.

- **The University also established a Centre for Energy Transition in 2020**, in line with priorities identified and commitments made in Aberdeen 2040. The Centre has a clear governance structure, a thematic focus, and is supported by dedicated academic champions. The Centre aims to facilitate a genuine interdisciplinary effort across research and education, including co-ordinating collaborative funding bids; offering courses on the fundamentals of energy transition; working with partners on skills development; and collaborating with international partners; for example, the Aberdeen-Curtin Alliance's work on interdisciplinary research.

- **In terms of immediate focus at an operational level** over the coming year, the priority remains as before on reducing emissions associated with energy use; the University is currently in the process of transitioning from a five-year Carbon Management Plan (CMP) to a long-term net-zero strategy. In the meantime, the current CMP (2016/21) has continued to produce positive results, with the five-year target for 20% emissions reduction surpassed early. There has also been continued reductions through improvements in how the University manages energy use, improved efficiency, and reduced demand. That progress has seen emissions reduced (i.e. across consistent aspects of Scopes 1, 2 & 3) from a baseline of 31,520 tC02e in 2015/16 to 20,738 tC02e in 2019/20.

University Outcome Agreement Impact Framework: Supporting Data

	Measure	\multicolumn{6}{c}{SFC Official Data}		Ambition
		2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20		2020-21
A	Number of Scottish-domiciled Undergraduate Entrants	1,515	1,401	1,643	1,307	1,474	1,551		1,551
B	Total number of Scottish-domiciled HN entrants from Scottish colleges to undergraduate programmes		139	197	211	212			
	Number of Scottish-domiciled HN entrants from Scottish colleges to undergraduate programmes with Advanced Standing		15	25	37	51			
	Proportion of Scottish-domiciled HN entrants from Scottish colleges to undergraduate programmes with Advanced Standing		10.8%	12.7%	17.5%	24.1%			24.1%
C	COWA measure:Total number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree entrants	1,453	1,339	1,577	1,200	1,366	1,444		
	COWA measure: Number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree entrants from the 20% most deprived areas	77	57	80	72	60	124		
	COWA measure: Proportion of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree entrants from the 20% most deprived areas	5.3%	4.3%	5.1%	6.0%	4.4%	8.6%		8.6%
D	Number of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants with care experience	2	10	22	11	26	20		
	Proportion of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants with care experience	0.2%	0.7%	1.4%	0.8%	1.8%	1.3%		1.3%
E	Number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first year entrants	1,055	1,422	1,317	1,549	1,190			
	Number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first year entrants returning to study in year 2	981	1,332	1,249	1,473	1,138			
	Proportion of Scottish-domiciled full-time first year entrants returning to study in year 2	93.0%	93.7%	94.8%	95.1%	95.6%			95.6%
F	The difference (+/-) from the individual institution benchmark figure for students satisfied with the overall quality of their course of study in the National Student Survey	0	1	0	1	1.9	2.8		1.9
G1	The number of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey				687				
	The number of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey in a positive destination				656				
	The proportion of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey in a positive destination				95.5%				95.5%
G2	The number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey in employment				548				
	The number of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey in employment in professional employment				355				
	The proportion of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree qualifiers responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey in employment in professional employment				64.8%				64.8%
H	Number of Scottish-domiciled Undergraduate Qualifiers	1,411	1,588	1,110	1,309	1,329	1,524		1,329

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITIES INNOVATION FUND (UIF) PLAN 2020/21

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

UPDATE

The following section provides an update on changes **to the detail of Aberdeen's UIF plan as a consequence of the covid-19 pandemic. The University has continued to engage with most aspects of our plan albeit that many activities have moved to online delivery and engagement. In AY20/21, we have and will continue to prioritise engagement with industry and other partners via Interface, Knowledge Transfer Partnerships or other channels to ensure that the University responds to industry's needs to test and develop technology to mitigate the health and economic effects of the current pandemic.**

Outcome 1

- **The refocus of OGTCs activities to solely provide support for net zero activities has resulted in changes to discussions on collaboration with the University to focus on our Centre for Energy Transition.**
- **Engagement of our staff and students with the life sciences theme of ACRD has continued, however plans to provide a bespoke training programme have been put on hold. Activity has taken place through support from ONE for training in 2020 and a life science accelerator programme planned to start in February 2021. The University will provide support to allow promising ideas to move towards investor-readiness through funding for IP protection, market research and the like.**
- **A new activity under this Outcome has been the formation of the 'Triple Helix' Alliance the University of Aberdeen, NHS Grampian, Robert Gordon University and Opportunity North East (ONE) regarding opportunities to develop collaborative, interdisciplinary projects aimed at developing innovations to provide solutions to areas of challenges for the NHS in delivering of their services, with a specific focus on use of data in digital innovation solutions.**

Outcome 2

- **Collaborative work under UIF on focus areas of the ISCF has moved entirely online. Aberdeen is leading on the energy transition theme of ISCF and online engagement has resulted academic involvement in discussions being achieved earlier than expected.**

Outcome 3

- **Plans to run a Business Booster for Aberdeen's postgraduate students has been put on hold. The University is instead offering on-line training for staff and students into the key considerations for engaging with industry. Support is being offered on an individual basis to staff and students building relationships and working with industry.**

Outcome 4

- **Our Lightbulb Business Ideas competition will be delivered on-line in 2021 rather than in person. Support for student entrepreneurs will be provided as flexibly as possible as envisaged below although in person support (including access to our ABVenture Zone co-working space) cannot be provided.**

Outcome 6

- **The University is supporting the delivery of the international conference on the Public Communication of Science and Technology in AY20/21. Originally scheduled to be**

- **held in Aberdeen in spring 2020, it was postponed due to covid-19 and will now be held as a fully online conference in May 2021.**
- **Public engagement activities have been carried out online rather than in person including large scale events such as EXPLORATHON and Festival of Social Science. Other of our Café engagement events have been replaced by our Café Connect series of short podcasts. The collaboration developed for EXPLORATON remains buoyant with the University supported the next phase of seeking external funding for the forthcoming years of the programme.**

ORIGINAL UIF PLAN BELOW FOR REFERENCE

Commitment to Collaboration across the Sector via Universities Scotland RCDG

Through Universities Scotland Research and Commercialisation Directors' Group (RCDG) each institution has agreed to contribute to various outcomes. Aberdeen will continue to work with the UIF Collaboration Manager to develop and use the framework for monitoring collaborative activity.

Aberdeen has committed to contributing to all outcomes with specific responsibility for leading the Innovation cluster of collaborative activities (in partnership with UHI and UWS). The main activities under the Innovation cluster relate to outcomes 1 – 4, encompassing increasing engagement and collaborative bids around ISCF calls, stimulating demand from SMEs for innovation, and developing researchers' skills for engaging with industry. Aberdeen will continue to lead on the ISCF and skills elements of the Innovation cluster, working in partnership with UHI on the SME demand stimulation activities and with the UIF Collaboration Manager, other HEIs, Interface, Innovation Centres, the Enterprise Agencies and other partners to deliver the objectives of this cluster of activities.

Aberdeen will continue to be an active participant in the other collaborative clusters (Internationalisation, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Growth and Equality & Diversity – Inclusive Scotland) and will contribute to workshops and other collaborative activities. As current chair of RCDG, Aberdeen has led the stakeholders' forum for the last three annual meetings, which included enterprise agencies, Interface, Scottish Government and SFC.

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

The University is a founding partner of the Aberdeen City Region Deal (ACRD) and provides senior leadership and engagement to ACRD through board membership. In collaboration with all the ACRD partners (Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils, the Robert Gordon University, Scottish Enterprise and Opportunity North East (ONE) (providing sector industry leadership)), the implementation strategy has been developed in response to industry demand. The ACRD is providing opportunities for industrial engagement through projects that address industry needs, and seeks to contribute to the economic development of the region through new job and company creation, particularly within the Innovation Themes of ACRD. The current five strands of Innovation include Oil and Gas, Life Sciences, Food, Drink and Agriculture, Tourism and Digital. Each strand includes activities around promoting and supporting entrepreneurship through accelerator programmes, which the University of Aberdeen is contributing to at various levels throughout the institution. City deal structures provide models of good practice for regional development, and where innovation is key to the strategy close cooperation amongst the academic, public and industry partners is essential. The Oil and Gas Technology Centre (OGTC) is now well-established and Aberdeen is in regular dialogue with OGTC Solution Centre Managers regarding project development and responding to thematic calls. Four projects are underway with others in preparation or under review. Additionally, we provide leadership at board level and academic expertise on OGTC review panels,

The National Decommissioning Centre of Excellence (NDC; a partnership between Aberdeen and OGTC which was formally opened in January 2019) is allowing our academic researchers to work alongside industrial partners to create solutions that will establish the NDC at the heart of this important industry The University was able to commit resources to this nationally important initiative through our UIF, but also the Strategic Investment Fund awarded from the SFC. Working closely with OGTC, the NDC is enhancing the interface between industry, researchers and regulators to provide each with opportunities to contribute to the development of the NDC research programme and to access the extensive facilities within the NDC. A Doctoral Training Centre has been established with the NDC, with an initial cohort of eight PhD studentship projects in progress and similar numbers are planned for future years to provide a pipeline of skilled researchers and personnel for the decommissioning sector.

Our new Centre for Energy Transition was announced in 2019 and aims to build on the University's status as a global leader in energy research and teaching. The Centre will align research and education programmes with the opportunities presented by the net zero agenda. A key role of the Centre will be to support industry in the transition to clean energy and renewables, building partnerships with industry and other stakeholders to address the requirements and solutions for Energy Transition, ensuring impact is achieved and to inform research.

Aberdeen will continue to work with ACRD partners and in particular ONE for the implementation of their business support programmes for the regional life sciences community and as a partner in the development of the Bio Hub – an innovation hub set to double the number of life sciences businesses in the North-East - and planned to open in March 2021. In collaboration with ONE, the University is planning a bespoke programme of training and support for life sciences spin outs and start ups in AY19/20 and AY20/21 to create three new companies per year over the next six years to provide a pipeline of new life sciences companies for incubation in the Bio Hub.

As a member of the Santander Universities Network, we are able to offer opportunities for businesses through our SME Internship Programme. On the back of its success over the last 4 years, we have built up a network of SMEs now accessing interns who previously may not have collaborated with universities. In collaboration with Santander and the wider network we are able to access, we use examples of the Internships to showcase the opportunities to access academic expertise and our highly skilled graduates. We have welcomed the shift in focus of the Network from 2019 towards inclusivity and widening participation.

We will continue our partnership approach with the Innovation Centres, Interface, and Knowledge Transfer Partnerships to enhance the demand from industry. In partnership with the North of Scotland KTP Centre, Aberdeen supported the KTP Managers conference in the new conference venue, P&J Live in Aberdeen. The University hosted the Sunday Times Life science Summit on the campus in 2020, as part of our strategy to attract new conferences to the region.

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

Aberdeen continues to lead on the collaborative UIF activity around encouraging bids for Industry Strategy Challenge Fund opportunities, which has focussed in AY19/20 on identifying areas of research strength complementary to ISCF Challenges.

Aberdeen has refreshed its Industrial Engagement Strategy, concentrating on three main themes: Skills & Employability, Research & Development and Entrepreneurship & Innovation, with each of these themes providing goals to enhance our engagement with industry. In particular, the goals of Research & Development theme are aimed at developing strategic and long-term relationships with industry. Implementation of this strategy will continue during AY20/21, supported by the appointment of a new Dean for Industry and Knowledge Exchange as part of the VP Research's team.

We are continuing the shift from transactional to partnership interactions with industry, with an emphasis on developing more strategic relationships with shared goals, and demonstrating to businesses the long term benefits of partnership. Working within the ACRD partners, this partnership approach enhances post project referral for further interactions and provides a model for regional collaboration. We will continue to provide a programme of training for researchers focused on the collaborative competencies to enhance engagement with businesses.

Aberdeen has been a strong supporter of simplifying processes and promoting efficient commercialisation, as demonstrated by our commitment to using standard templates wherever possible and our track record in commercialisation. Aberdeen is a member of the Universities Scotland RCDG Contracts Sub-Group which has already provided a range of commonly used contracts (recently refreshed and promoted on Interface's website) supporting simplification and harmonisation of the process for businesses to access knowledge within all universities. We will continue to promote good practice and knowledge within our partnership with the ACRD and other multi party collaborations.

As current chair of RCDG's sub-group to support and promote good practice for spin-outs, we also continue to promote the agreed common principles within our institutional policies.

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

Aberdeen has and will continue to participate in the SME Demand Stimulation Innovation cluster collaborative activities led by UHI. Following on from our successful collaboration with Edinburgh and Glasgow on the ESRC-funded Business Booster project, aimed at engaging industry with social scientists, Aberdeen is planning to run a further Business Booster programme for its own PGR students and ECRs in 2020. This will involve Aberdeen researchers working with industry and other stakeholders on problems brought to us directly from industry and will be open to all academic disciplines.

Aberdeen has evidenced our commitment to engaging and collaborating with other universities and the enterprise agencies through our partnership approach in ACRD, but also our ongoing commitment to the long standing partnership of the North of Scotland KTP centre. The KTP centre which is hosted between Aberdeen and RGU has seen a significant increase in the demand for KTPs from both industry and university partners across all sectors, requiring an expansion of the team.

We will continue our staff development activities, providing in-house training to staff and extending to externally-sourced training and conferences as required. We welcome the opportunity afforded by our leadership of the Researcher Skills theme of the Innovation cluster to examine best practice in training researchers for engagement with industry and other stakeholders, and will adopt training that complements and enhances our current activities.

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

Aberdeen's Business School is currently scoping opportunities to embed entrepreneurship in its UG and PG teaching as part of an on-going plan to provide a Centre for Entrepreneurship encompassing teaching, research and support for entrepreneurial students and staff. The Business School is also bidding to participate in the scale up pathfinder programme (Think. Scale. Act.), in collaboration with RGU and UHI.

Aberdeen will continue to support its ABVenture Zone incubator for entrepreneurs pre-incorporation (including social enterprises) and for micro-SMEs. We will also continue to host carefully selected non-student start-ups to ensure a creative mix of entrepreneurs in the incubator. We will provide a hosting opportunity for entrepreneurs applying for RSE Enterprise Fellowships. We will expand the range of support for staff and students engaging with start-ups through a presence in the ONE Tech Hub.

Our Lightbulb business ideas competition has recently completed its fourth year in 2020, and has so far expanded year on year, supported by an Intern funded by the University. Focussed on developing early stage ideas and supported by student entrepreneurs, Lightbulb promotes entrepreneurial thinking and provides a pipeline of potential start up opportunities. The University will work with Elevator and accelerator programmes offered by ONE to channel entrepreneurial staff and students into relevant accelerator programmes.

Aberdeen is an active and successful participant in the Converge Challenge competition, with a number of past finalists and winners including runner-up in the main competition in 2019. We will run internal workshops and business plan competitions to raise awareness, encourage entrepreneurship and provide support for promising early-stage start-ups with the aim of funnelling these into other opportunities.

Engagement with Elevator's summer accelerator programme is now an established part of our support for start ups and we will continue to support student entrepreneurs entering into this programme, providing bursaries for participants to support inclusive growth. A further level of support has been added from AY18/19 due to the UIF uplift and to be continued in AY20/21 due to support from Santander Universities. Our AB Ventures fund will provide small start up grants (up to £2000) to student entrepreneurs to support business activities such as IP protection, web site development, purchase of equipment or consumables, matched in kind or in cash from the student businesses.

We will work with the University of Strathclyde which (with Stirling) leads the Entrepreneurship cluster of collaborative activities to ensure that programmes supporting entrepreneurship create a cohesive system for support to entrepreneurs.

Aberdeen will contribute to the ongoing development of Scottish Enterprise's High Growth Spin out Programme, promoting to our potential spin-outs where appropriate and participating in discussions with Scottish Enterprise regarding support for development of innovative businesses.

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

We continue to use networks to enhance collaborative opportunities for our researchers. These networks include the European Network, AURORA, our continued commitment to our Confucius Centre, our global Alliance with Curtin University (involving staff exchanges) and the multiple partnerships supported by the Newton Fund and Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). We use the AURORA Network to provide a platform for enhanced collaboration and to seek new opportunities for research and knowledge exchange across Europe, particularly around sustainability, social inclusion and promoting mobility.

We are progressing with the projects funded through GCRF and have used SFC funding for GCRF activities to appoint a specialist GCRF Business Development Officer and enable a pump priming fund to accelerate future applications. In 2020, we will appoint an Impact Support Officer specifically focussed on developing impact from GCRF-funded projects. We will promote the UK Science and Innovation Network to our researchers and business contacts and enhance our use of Research management information to promote the sharing of networks.

We are undertaking a range of collaborative approaches in international projects. Notably, we are partnering with the Al Faleh Group for Education and Academic Services to open a £100M campus in Qatar, expanding the range of programmes offered by the University in Qatar to include STEM subjects, medical sciences, law, and politics and international relations. Aberdeen continues to support the University Innovations from Scotland project which is currently funded by a number of Scottish universities and is run out SDI's US East Coast office. We commit to using the Scotland is Now branding where appropriate and contributing to the Connected Scotland project including participation in Going Global events to showcase Scotland's research strengths.

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

Public engagement remains a priority – the University of Aberdeen's Public Engagement with Research Unit (PERU) maintains a calendar of popular events which include Explorathon, British Science Week and the successful lecture series Café Scientifique and Café Med. The Aberdeen-led *EXPLORATHON (European Researchers' Night, Scotland)* project, in collaboration with the universities of Glasgow, Strathclyde, St Andrews and the Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement was renewed in 2018 and an application for support for 2020 has been submitted. Many of the tools and approaches are now being used across other collaborative training networks funded by the EC.

Using Wellcome Trust's Institutional Strategic Support Fund (ISSF), PERU is enabling large public engagement projects that involve collaborations between the arts and sciences and is building partnerships across the city, with target audiences ranging from primary school children to policy makers. ISSF funding will support four projects in 2020 with a range including the use of marine genetic resources; use of Birth Cohorts; genetics and STEM inspiring workshops for secondary schools.

In AY18/19 and 19/20, our involvement with the St Andrews-led Cell Block Science project has resulted in opportunities for our researchers to engage with hard-to-reach audiences of prisoners and their families. Our work with SHMU (Station House Media Unit) in Aberdeen has been awarded second round Curiosity funding (BBC Children in Need/Wellcome Trust), building on the success of our first round funding, and over the next three years young people will co-create with University scientists science-based radio and TV shows, videos and podcasts and carry out citizen science projects on themes relevant to their communities. The University of Aberdeen again supported Doors Open day in 2019 and will support in September 2020. The University is one of the largest contributors of buildings to Doors Open day in Aberdeen and received 21% of the total visits. Aimed at a broad range of the public, over 4000 visitors took the opportunity to visit ten University buildings, where staff and volunteers provided tours of labs and facilities.

We will continue to deliver training programmes for researchers as part of these initiatives and also from our *Grants Academy* to support engagement with a broad range of stakeholders including the public and industry.

Our public research portal provides an enhanced approached to digital communication of our research activities, with access to the institutional repository of publications and, in addition, delivers researcher fingerprinting technology enabling identification of expertise. It also allows researchers, research users, business and members of the public to explore expertise and publications across all research areas within the University of Aberdeen.

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

We will continue to ensure positive promotion of equality and diversity in staff and all who are affected by the use of UIF. We will continue to participate in the Heriot-Watt led Equality & Diversity collaborative cluster. Aberdeen has led the formation of an RCDG subgroup on Responsible Innovation, a forum which will have equality, diversity, inclusion and sustainable innovation as key themes. Sharing of best practice and information from these groups will inform activities and projects supported by UIF.