

Highlands and Islands Regional Tertiary Outcome Agreement 2022-23



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HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS REGIONAL TERTIARY OUTCOME AGREEMENT 2022-23

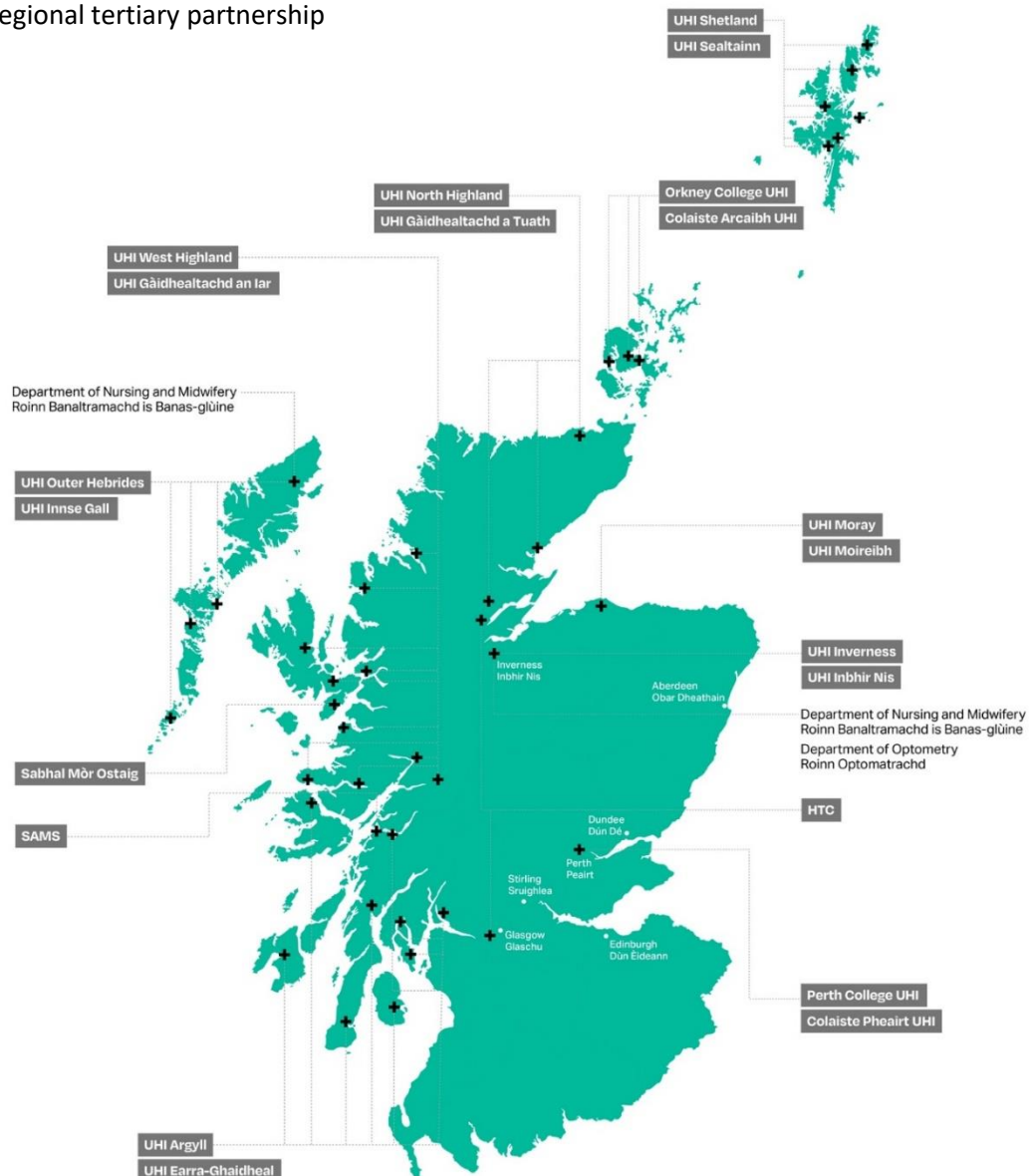
Introduction

The University of the Highlands and Islands is the only university based in our region, covering the Highlands and Islands, Perth and Kinross, and Moray. We are a tertiary institution, the first in Scotland, providing access to a range of programmes across all the SCQF levels.

Access to our further and higher education study and research opportunities is through a distinctive educational partnership of colleges and research institutions. Each academic partner has its own character, contribution to our distinctive organisation and impact within its communities. As a partnership we have a student-centred culture and individual approach to student learning.

Our partnership spans nine local authorities, two enterprise regions and seven health boards. We have strong links with employers, and other institutions, locally, regionally, nationally and globally.

Our regional tertiary partnership



Impacts of the Covid pandemic and Brexit on recruitment and retention, particularly for full-time study, has been a specific challenge for UHI in both HE and FE. There was evidence that our region was particularly vulnerable to these external factors due to issues such as digital connectivity and the reliance on EU workers in many of the key sectors. The expected level of redundancies during Covid did not materialise and within our region there is now high employment and unfilled job vacancies which, especially during a cost-of-living crisis, provides a viable, if possibly short-term, alternative to full-time study.

For FE, this started in 2019-20 with the greatest impact on credits delivered seen in 2020-21 due to issues including disruption to provision, particularly in practical and work-based programmes, and the continuation of social distancing measures which affected capacity and the learner experience. While challenges remained in 2021-22, the overall credits delivered against target improved, the evidence of recovery and growth is reinforced with our early predictions for credits delivered in 2022-23 which are expected to exceed target.

The phasing of the impact on HE funded FTEs was different, with high demand seen in 2020-21 particularly from late applications and continuing students. This however has been followed by steep declines in 2021-22 and expected in 2022-23 fuelled by a fall in demand for full-time study. Given our widening access and regional mission, UHI has been particularly affected by the identified fall in mature applications through UCAS for 2022 entry (pre-Clearing) a trend which has been seen in our own student analysis, a shift toward applications for higher tariff universities in part due to increased funded places and competition in the sector, and the expected sectoral challenges to HN recruitment.

Further intelligence will be presented to SFC to evidence disproportionate impacts on UHI and the need for continued funding support to allow us to help our region's economic and social recovery and growth ambitions.

Looking to the future:

In response to the challenging and complex landscapes, the leadership of the UHI partnership has agreed a workplan to generate financial sustainability through a more integrated and connected university, supported by simplified governance arrangements and strong devolved decision making to a local level. UHI2024 is a wide ranging and extensive programme of work that aims to reshape UHI. There are seven workstreams which include senior executive staff and non-executive colleagues, with work being undertaken over the next 18-24 months:

- Tertiary curriculum growth
- Shared services
- Focussed UHI executive office
- Simplified governance
- Collaborative communications
- People and culture
- Vision and strategy

Alongside the UHI2024 workstreams, a financial sustainability strategy and more focused student recruitment and retention strategies will be developed and implemented during 2022-23.

The outputs of the UHI2024 workstreams and implementation of financial and student number strategies will have a positive impact on our partnership and on our region. As a tertiary institution with a regional mission to support economic recovery, sustainability and wellbeing, UHI also welcomes and will engage fully with the Scottish Government's education reviews – principles and purpose; national discussion on education; independent review of qualifications and assessments and of the skills delivery landscape; and reforming education bodies. UHI also wishes to work with SFC to co-create an approach to funding that addresses our specific rural context and the need to deliver through a dispersed network of campuses often with small cohorts of students.

Early in 2022, we launched a new visual identity to market our offerings more effectively through a more connected and recognisable family brand. Ten years on from establishing university status, UHI has built a strong foundation, and the new visual identity and positioning of the partnership around 'where learning means more' will help strengthen our engagement with audiences regionally, nationally and internationally.

Following a period of public consultation which saw support from staff, students and external stakeholders, the boards of management of UHI North Highland, UHI Outer Hebrides and UHI West Highlands recently voted unanimously in a favour of the merger of the three UHI colleges. The merger will create a more sustainable organisation with combined capacity and resource to grow curriculum and research and innovation; develop our partnerships to support employers address the skills shortages in our area; and become more responsive to the social, cultural, and economic opportunities. Lydia Rohmer has been named as principal designate with responsibility for collaboratively leading the senior teams towards a merger date in August 2023 and establishing the new college.

In November 2022, we were delighted to win a prestigious award recognising 'outstanding contribution to the regional economy'. The accolade was presented at the annual Scottish Council for Development and Industry Business Excellence Awards in Inverness. The SCDI award recognises our efforts to support the economic development of the communities we serve. Over the past decade, UHI has led growth in the regional economy, providing employment and educational pathways which were previously unavailable in the region. An independent economic impact assessment published by Biggar Economics in 2020 found that the UHI partnership contributes £560 million to the Highlands and Islands, Moray and Perthshire economies every year and supports 6,200 jobs. It also revealed that for every £1 invested in UHI, UHI puts £4 back into the economies of the communities it serves.

As the only university based in our region, we are intensely aware of our responsibilities to enhance the status of Gaelic. Our current Gaelic Language plan 2019-2022 contains our continuing commitments to shape the Gaelic services we provide for staff, students and the public. Our fourth Gaelic Language Plan, 2022-2025, has now been completed and we are in final discussion with Bòrd na Gàidhlig before publication.

Section 1: Outcomes for students

1 Fair access and transitions

Education is accessible to students from all backgrounds and students at all levels are supported through successful pathways.

One of the key elements in our commitment to widening access is our tertiary curriculum which offers integrated pathways from school to further and higher education using academic and vocational routes to maximise opportunity. Through these pathways, we are delivering seamless supported learning journeys with progression opportunities through the SCQF levels up to postgraduate research. Being locally based within our communities, relevant outreach activities are promoting access to the most hard-to-reach individuals and groups, as well as working in partnership with relevant local organisations.

1.1 Access national measures for 2022-23

Higher education – SFC funded targets and Scotland domiciled undergraduate entrants

The downturn in student numbers which started at UHI in 2021-22, especially for full-time study, has continued into 2022-23. This is a result of various factors including a shift in applications towards higher tariff institutions, increased competition due to more funded places in the sector and the availability of employment during this time of cost-of-living concerns. At this stage in the academic year there is still some fluctuation in the system and the university partnership is now actively engaged in maximising the in-year recruitment opportunities, however it is anticipated that SFC funded FTEs will be well below target.

Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants (SDUEs): as reflected in the comments above, on current data, 2022-23 numbers will be significantly reduced, estimated at this time to be approximately 10% below last year.

Further education - SFC credit targets

For further education, 2022-23 will see our continued recovery from the disproportionate impacts to our region of the Covid pandemic and Brexit. As previously articulated to SFC, since our pandemic low of 95,698 credits (SFC target 112,382) in 2020-21, UHI has been projecting a gradual but steady recovery, expecting to return to pre-pandemic credit levels in 2023-24. To date, we are ahead of those earlier recovery projections.

In 2021-22 our region credits increased to 109,759 during another challenging emergency year, 1,800 credits more than had been forecast in February 2022. In 2022-23 we are already exceeding our quarter one credit delivery plans (achieving 105% of planned credits for this period), and we are currently projecting to exceed our reduced 2022-23 SFC regional target (112,925) and reach over 113,500 credits by the end of this year.

Within this total our Foundation Apprenticeship (FA) credits are still expected to be slightly below regional target (expecting circa 3,500 FA credits against our target of 3,942), however this will still be a significant increase on last year (circa 70% increase on 2021-22 delivery of 2,030 FA

credits) as this provision continues to take time to re-establish within the school senior phase following the significant pandemic disruption to our practical and work-based programmes.

Within our core FE provision, a decline in full-time enrolments is expected to continue in 2022-23, within the context of high employment across our region, which has already been evidenced during quarter one of this year. However, changes to our provision and delivery models to accommodate this changing external environment has seen significant increases in an already high proportion of part-time provision across our region, which is expected to continue throughout the remainder of the year. By the end of 2022-23 we are now projecting that almost 45% of all FE credits will come from part-time provision (compared to 37% in 2018-19, and 39% in 2021-22).

2022-23 will also see the continued recovery of school-link provision and some key areas of practical provision that were most hit by the pandemic, such as engineering and construction. This includes significant growth in demand for FE provision as part of a Modern Apprenticeship (again in the context of high employment), albeit our ability to meet this growing demand is being severely impacted by the current SDS contract and funding restrictions. Other growth areas include increases in demand for ESOL, STEM provision in schools, and the continued success of shared delivery models across UHI academic partners to support non-practical provision to lower numbers of students in some of our most rural and remote areas.

This continued positive FE recovery trend reinforces our previous projection that 2023-24 will see a return to pre-pandemic credit levels, and we look forward to continuing our liaison with SFC ahead of 2023-24 credit and funding allocations to ensure our region's recovery and demand for FE provision continues to be supported.

1.2 Continued commitment to key policies, priority groups and targets

Fair access

UHI is in the unique position of being able to offer a wide range of entry points for learners and a range of progression pathways. Our published entry requirements do not set unnecessarily high (selective) barrier for applicants but are set at the minimum required to successfully complete the programme. When considering applications, we look beyond grades achieved to find the right option for each individual, including consideration of a number of contextual indicators.

Over recent years, UHI has developed robust procedures for the recognition of prior learning (RPL). We welcome both prior certified and prior experiential or work-based learning. Each year we receive several hundred applications for RPL. During the past year we contributed to the revision of the QAA RPL Framework for Scottish HE institutions, including leading on the writing of one of the new chapters. We are confident that our procedures and standards will go beyond the expectations of the new framework. To coincide with its publication (due in late 2022), we will take the opportunity to highlight the opportunities for the recognition of prior experiential learning to the academic and student community, promoting resources and support available internally to assist those assessing such applications.

During the coming year we will continue to support RPL by promoting its availability to applicants. In doing so we aim to ensure that applicants with suitable prior learning are fully supported, and learning assessed seamlessly as part of the application process. UHI also fully

supports our partnership with SWAP East as an important part of our widening access agenda. As a university member of SWAP East, we review our course pathways on an annual basis to ensure that all possible pathways to our degree curriculum are assessed and available to SWAP East students. UHI is also a college member of SWAP through several of our academic partners. Many of our partners have cooperated to develop an access to nursing course, while UHI Perth has developed an access to humanities course that is now delivered online, so it is available to students throughout the UHI region, and indeed Scotland. This year we will be working with SWAP to further promote these opportunities now that they are fully operational.

As well as a longstanding partnership with ASPIRENorth, the university is now working with LEAPS (Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools) and recognises its transitions course which may be accepted as an alternative to an SQA Higher entry requirement.

Articulation

The focus for 2022-23 is to develop more targeted recruitment activities in colleges to promote the articulation opportunities available at UHI.

National measure - proportion of Scottish-domiciled entrants with an HN from a Scottish college entering with advanced standing (note, only includes articulation from other Scottish colleges and not internal HNC/D progression within UHI): the latest available data from the national articulation database is for 2020-21 and shows this proportion to be 64.1%. This national measure has fluctuated over the years, with relatively small numbers involved in the calculation. The highest level was achieved in 2019-20 (80.1%), it is anticipated that the pandemic years and potential for disruption to study contributed to the fall back to previous levels. Even within the context of our falling entrant numbers, we are committed to continuing improvement in the proportion of HN entrants achieving advanced standing and anticipate an increase in 2022-23.

Learners from areas of multiple deprivation SIMD20 (HE) and SIMD10 (FE)

We perform well in recruiting from these areas particularly compared to the population within our region who reside there. Issues relating to the relevance of SIMD as a measure of deprivation in our region are well documented as are the comparisons with measures relating to remote and rural access to services, fuel poverty, digital connectivity etc. which are a greater challenge to many of our communities and will only grow with the cost-of-living issues.

National measure - SIMD20 students (HE): after achieving around 10% of SDUE from SIMD20 areas in 2018-19 and 2019-20, which was above target, we were cautious about how realistic it was to maintain this level during the pandemic years. Also, the numbers in this measure are relatively low for UHI and therefore small changes can have a significant impact on percentage fluctuations. This caution was well placed as we saw levels fluctuate from 8.6% in 2020 to 12.2% in 2021-22. Any differential impact on this group from the current external environment and cost of living issues remains unclear, however we are committed to a target of 10.5% in 2022-23.

National measures - SIMD10 (FE): during the pandemic emergency years our FE targets in this area have aimed to maintain 2018-19 baselines, as per previous SFC guidance. However, for SIMD10 learners UHI saw a slight increase above this in 2020-21 and we are currently projecting that 2021-22 data will show similar levels.

For 2022-23, while the region's focus will continue to be on enhancement of the success rates of these students rather than real terms growth in student numbers, we are aiming to achieve a similar proportion to 2020-21 and 2021-22 with **4.0%** of our credits being delivered to learners in the most deprived 10% of postcode areas. Applied against our 2022-23 regional credit target, we expect this to equate to **4,517 credits**, which will be a significant increase compared to previous years.

Care-experienced and other under-presented groups

We continue to work on encouraging disclosure and identifying the students from under-represented groups and ensure they are aware of the support available to them. Care-experience is one of our HE application contextual indicators and we have a continued commitment to offering a place to applicants who disclose care-experience who meet the minimum requirements of the programme.

Care experienced students, upon disclosure, are proactively contacted to ensure they are made aware of the support available to them during their studies. They will be introduced to their local student support team and, if required, a support plan may be put in place. A dedicated [webpage](#) has been created to promote the support on offer to care experienced students. Staff are required to undertake mandatory corporate parenting training so they are aware of the challenges faced by care experienced students, what it means to be a corporate parent and how staff can ensure this group are supported. UHI will continue to participate in the national care experienced week to promote the support available and again will survey care experienced students to gain their feedback on their experience of engaging with our support services. The UHI Corporate Parenting Plan is reviewed annually to ensure actions are updated. The UHI priority groups forum which includes representatives from each academic partner, continues to work for our vulnerable groups, including care experienced students, and shares good practice.

Student carers and estranged students, upon disclosure, are also proactively supported in a similar way to those who are care experienced. UHI continues with our commitment to engagement in the estranged students' solidarity week and carers week to promote the support available to all of these vulnerable groups.

Further work is also being done to progress our BSL plan. Focus will be on staff undertaking deaf awareness training and reviewing webpages which could be translated into BSL, to make them more inclusive. The Inclusive Practitioner Toolkit remains an important resource to all staff working with students who have disclosed any disability and will continue to be promoted widely.

National measures

In higher education: the proportion of Scottish-domiciled care-experienced entrants has remained relatively static over the last few years, however we had our highest ever reported figure in 2020-21 (1.9%). For UHI the numbers involved in this measure are also relatively small meaning that percentage fluctuations can be quite significant even with minimal change. In 2021-22, the proportion fell back to previous levels, 1.5%. While the longer-term impact of the pandemic, economic environment and cost-of-living crisis on this group is still unclear, we are continuing our focus on supporting applicants and students and therefore seek to maintain at 1.6% for 2022-23.

For further education, during the pandemic emergency years our FE targets in this area have aimed to maintain 2018-19 baselines, as per previous SFC guidance. However, and as a result of the positive work done by UHI academic partners, including through the corporate parenting action plans and further education strategy for the enhancement of student attainment, UHI saw an increase above this in 2020-21, and is currently projecting that 2021-22 data will show similar levels.

For 2022-23, as part of our continued commitment and delivery to students declaring care experience and a focus on improving outcomes for this group, we are aiming to maintain this positive increase over the last couple of years, expecting **5.0%** of our credits to be delivered to care-experienced learners. Applied against our 2022-23 regional credit target, we expect this to equate to **5,646 credits**, which will be a significant increase compared to previous years.

Senior phase pupils (DYW)

Senior phase vocational provision, within the context of the Developing the Young Workforce programme, continues to establish itself as a vital and core part of UHI's further education offer, with year-on-year growth established pre-pandemic. Our target setting during the pandemic emergency years has been focussed on maintaining our previous 2018-19 high of 1,050 pupils studying vocational qualifications, however, and in spite of the significant challenges we faced throughout the pandemic, our performance in this area has been extremely positive throughout this time and is testament to the dedication and hard work of staff. The university partnership's expertise and track record of blended learning and online delivery, such as through the already established 'Virtual School Timetable' in Highland, has been crucial during this time.

National measure - number of senior phase age pupils studying vocational qualifications delivered by colleges: based on this better-than-expected recent performance, for 2022-23 UHI will now seek to consolidate and maintain this, expecting **1,250** pupils to study vocational qualifications with us this year.

2 High quality learning, teaching and support

Students at all levels experience 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

2.1 Learning and teaching strategy and enhancement themes

Following a wide-ranging consultation process, a new Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy (LTES) 2022-27, a single unified strategy for the UHI partnership, was launched in October 2022. Entitled 'making learning mean more' the strategy seeks to articulate and support the development and embedding of learning and teaching practices that help us to realise both our 'where learning means more' ethos, and the ambitions of UHI's 'Daring to be Different' 2021-22 Strategic Plan. The new LTES comprises five key components:

- Ten learning and teaching enhancement values (LTE Values) that define the aspects or dimensions of learning and teaching that all our students should experience during their time with us, regardless of what they are studying, their level, location or mode of study.

- Four ‘enabling practices’ which define the professional practices or activities that colleagues with learning and teaching responsibilities should engage in, or be supported to engage in, both to inform their own teaching and to contribute to the wider enhancement of learning and teaching.
- An implementation plan to enable the embedding of the LTE values and practices in policy, practice and professional development provision across UHI to drive learning and teaching enhancement over the five-year timescale of the strategy.
- Exemplars of effective embedding of the LTE values from across UHI, drawn from current further education and higher education provision, to provide an insight into different ways each of the LTE values can be embedded in practice.
- Mapping of the LTE values to key internal and external strategies and benchmarks (e.g., UKPSF, GTCS standards for teaching in Scotland’s colleges), to articulate the internal and external applicability of the values.

The next university-wide learning and teaching conference in June 2023 will provide an important opportunity to celebrate learning and teaching practices that are informed by or already exemplify the pedagogic aspirations within the LTES.

Evidence-based enhancement:

A commitment to evidence-based enhancement of learning, teaching and the student experience is central to the new LTES. This reflects wider initiatives and processes that place evidence and data at the centre of enhancement focused activity. This includes annual subject network quality monitoring dialogues that are informed by detailed self-evaluation documents providing evidence and reflection on best practice, patterns of student engagement and retention, recruitment, areas of challenge and action planning for the next academic year. Student evaluative data generated through surveys including NSS, student satisfaction and engagement survey and end of semester module surveys are increasingly complemented by developing institutional capabilities in the use of engagement indicators and learning analytics.

Resilience in learning, teaching and the student experience:

As part of the UHI’s engagement in the QAA Scotland’s national enhancement theme of ‘resilient learning communities’, we are exploring the implications of, and approaches to developing resilience in four key dimensions: the resilient university; resilient learners; the resilient curriculum; and resilient staff. A key outcome from our internal work will be the resilience toolkit of guidance and case studies currently being developed. The work being done on resilience has been informed by the period of the pandemic to better understand the impacts and potential changes in student expectations, we have established a learning spaces consultation group to ensure physical and digital spaces are used to support different kinds of learning and teaching and different sizes of cohorts.

Enhancement-focused professional development:

Our last ELIR report included commendation of the learning and teaching academy for providing an engaging community hub highly valued by staff. It was recommended that we develop and articulate an institution-wide staff development approach to support the “enhancement of teaching practice that appropriately values and recognises teaching practice and ensures parity of esteem between teaching and research”. This is being addressed through alignment and integration of activities and teams who provide support for professional development. Approaches to staff development in learning and teaching practice in our tertiary context, including peer review and monitoring engagement are also being discussed, along with a process for the recognition of five individual pathways to professorial title for academic staff across the university to support career progression.

Tertiary quality framework

The Scottish Government, working via SFC, has an ambition to develop a single quality framework for further and higher education. As a tertiary institution, UHI is well placed to support and inform this development and has been proactively involved in the work to date. It is hoped that a tertiary quality framework will (i) make transition between levels and types of learning simpler for students and (ii) reduce the overall quality assurance burden on staff and students. At the same time the project is identifying best practice across both sectors. Currently the framework is due to be rolled out early in 2023 and, as a tertiary institution, UHI will seek to adopt it at the earliest opportunity,

2.2 Supporting student experience

The rise in the cost of living has been a hot topic internally in UHI and across the sector as institutions try to find ways to support students through this crisis. The UHI hardship group is looking at the best ways to use discretionary funds to support those most in need. A fundraising appeal resulted in donations received to assist students, plans are underway by the UHI advancement and engagement team to seek further philanthropic support for students during 2022-23. Questions on student funding were added to the UHI early student experience survey this year, which will provide a deeper understanding of our student hardship and awareness of funding opportunities. Our partner colleges are also undertaking initiatives to support students including:

- Breakfast clubs with free toast, tea and coffee for all students
- Soup and roll lunch clubs for students
- Organising donations/sales of second-hand clothing, books and other items
- Creating loyalty schemes within campus cafes
- Working closely with local foodbanks
- Setting up college pantries/foodbanks
- Promotion of [Too Good To Go](#) app which lists local places with unsold food which can be purchased at a reduced price.
- Reviewing opening times and 'warm spaces' on campus for students to use
- Reviewing café prices to ensure they are affordable
- Promotion of free bus travel to students under 22 years of age.

Additional digital poverty funds have been received from SFC and are being distributed to our partner colleges for them to purchase equipment locally for students requiring digital support. The university will monitor uptake and demand for devices, and provide support, where required.

Measuring and making evidence-based decisions about the impact of our student support services has been an ongoing challenge for many years. The main issue is that we lacked meaningful regional and, in many cases, local data which allows us to record interactions with students and the impact this has on student retention, persistence and success. A new system to support this analysis has been implemented, with a proposed launch date of January 2023. The critical outcomes of this systems will be:

- Improved organisational efficiency in a core operational function.
- Collation of accurate data to demonstrate the impact of our services.
- Reporting of accurate data to underpin service improvement.

2.3 Student mental health and wellbeing

Supporting student mental health and wellbeing is crucial to providing safe and supportive learning experiences. [Our services](#) are designed to ensure that all students, regardless of their circumstance or location, can access mental health and counselling resources and support. Through our student mental health group and our mental health practitioners' networks we proactively discuss support for care experienced students, and other vulnerable groups, the unique issues that they may face and ways of helping them achieve their academic outcomes.

The university's mental health and counselling team increased last year with the additional post of regional mental health coordinator, this role enabled us to provide more enhanced support for the activities taking place through our academic partners and to our students across the network. We currently hold the Healthy Body Healthy Mind bronze award and are now aiming to achieve the silver award.

We continue to offer out-of-hours support through external providers Spectrum Life, a 24/7, 365 telephone support service and portal and Togetherall, our online chat forum support. Both systems are complementary to each other and provide out of hours support to students when most in need of support within a safe monitored environment.

Extensive work has also been done to review information for staff and a toolkit is now available <https://staffresources.uhi.ac.uk/mhc/>

Gender-based violence (GBV):

The university recently recruited a Student Support Officer, on a 2-year fixed term contract, who is predominately working to strengthen our prevention of, and response to, [GBV](#) to ensure students are kept safe while studying with UHI. Going forward a focus will be on:

- Development of a GBV policy
- Creation of a student disclosure tool
- Joint working with external agencies such as Highland Violence Against Women Partnership, Rape and Sexual Assault Service Highland (RASASH), Women's Aid Groups etc.
- Continue to participate in the annual 16 Days of Action campaign.
- Promote the GBV student online module, created by Rape Crisis Scotland.
- Roll out Rape Crisis Scotland training to university staff.
- Provide specialist knowledge to support the UHI partnership on how to respond and deal with disclosures of GBV appropriately.

2.5 Core national measures targets

Retention (HE) - proportion of SDUEs (full-time, first year) returning to year two: latest available data is for 2019-20 entrants continuing into 2020-21, with a proportion returning of 82.1% down from 85% the previous year. From the HESA student return, we anticipate that will fall back again for 2020 entrants who continued into 2021, as we did see higher withdrawals. However, we have set a target for 2021 entrants to maintain around 82%.

Qualifiers (HE) – number of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate qualifiers: With our range of different curriculum across the SCQF levels and numerous exit and progression points, this is quite a complex measure to understand trends and set targets. The recent impacts on student numbers makes the position even more complex. In 2021-22, the number of qualifiers was 2508

down from 2655 the previous year. Given the fall in entrants numbers some of which will be undertaking HNCs, who would be expected to qualify in a year, the anticipated target for 2022-23 has been lowered to 2400.

Success (HE): The 2022 NSS saw our best-ever overall satisfaction score at 5.6% above the benchmark and placing us fourth in Scotland. We have performed well in the survey during the covid pandemic as students responded positively to our actions to protect physical safety, provide access to resources and to keep them informed of changes to their course. UHI's established expertise in developing blended learning approaches to connect our student communities also facilitated the required changes to deliver. Anticipating a potential return to more 'normal' expectations and with the proposed changes to questions for NSS2023, we have set a target of 1% above benchmark.

Although not in the national measures, UHI received a score of 95% student satisfaction in the 2022 Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, the highest rating of any Scottish university and fourth out of the 91 participating institutions across the UK.

Student success and satisfaction (FE): Student success and satisfaction rates for the region have typically exceeded the national average, with some of our academic partners achieving the highest success rates in the sector in recent years. During the pandemic emergency years, it has been difficult to maintain these same high levels, particularly given the impacts on student engagement, deferral rates and completion caused by the ongoing pandemic disruption.

As in 2021-22, our approach to targets in these key areas remains one of maintenance or at least recovery back towards our high 2018-19 baselines, and it has been extremely encouraging to see our 2021-22 SSES overall satisfaction rate of 93.9% for the region exceeding our 2021-22 ROA target, particularly given the continued challenges for students and their provision during this period.

For 2022-23, our targets for full-time and part-time students successfully achieving a recognised qualification will again seek to maintain our 2018-19 baseline, set at **68.6%** and **82.1%** respectively.

For student satisfaction, we will seek to consolidate and maintain our 2021-22 performance with a target of **94.0%** overall satisfied with their college experience, a return to our previously high levels in this area.

3 Partnership, participation, and student experience

Students find it easy to participate, have their voice heard and valued, and influence their educational and student experience.

3.1 Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) and student representation

The Student Partnership Agreement sets out how students and staff work together to improve the student experience. The regional [Student Partnership Agreement \(SPA\)](#) 2022 runs throughout the calendar year, from January to December 2022. The SPA details how students (as represented by the student's association) and the university will work in partnership. In addition to the regular areas of work, three areas have been chosen for particular focus during the year:

1. Disability support, awareness and accessibility.
2. Socialising, connectivity and community.
3. Environment and green sustainability.

3.2 Student voice

HISA (the Highlands and Islands students' association) has introduced a range of changes to the appointment and registration of student voice reps. A new self-registration system for reps is now live and will link to a database, which is in development to allow monitoring and staff access to rep details. Promotion of reps has gone well with academic partners and local HISA staff active in recruiting at the start of semester. Training of student voice rep trainers took place in the summer, with input from student engagement and HISA staff. Student voice rep training was also updated and renewed.

4 Learning with impact for students

Students at all levels are equipped to flourish in employment, further study and to lead fulfilling lives. **Relates also to outcomes for economic and social recovery: confident and highly capable - work-ready - graduates**
Work-ready graduates are confident and ready to secure success in their career, meeting employer needs and making a positive contribution to our economy and society: Students are equipped to take up employment and succeed in the job market.

4.1 Supporting student employability

UHI's career development practitioners bring a wealth of life experience and perspectives which we use to support, encourage, reassure, and motivate our students and graduates. The UHI careers and employability team offer stand-alone workshops and sessions as part of a programme of interventions. 2022-23 will see a move towards interventions integrated into course delivery. These will be tailored to fit the needs of students and the courses they are pursuing. These sessions will be 'career shorts' which are 30 minutes in length plus longer interactive workshops taking up to two hours. They can be adapted to suit any level of study.

To complement our workshop programme, all current students (FE and HE) have access to *FutureMe*, an online careers management tool which enables users to book guidance appointments, get CV feedback or a mock interview, attend employability events, and search the Job Shop. Appointments, covering any aspect of career development, continue to be developed by phone, MS Teams/Webex, or email. We aim to develop the functionality of *FutureMe* to create directed learning 'pathway' content for students. Pathway content focuses on skills development in relation to career thinking and confidence and readiness. It supports students prepare in a safe and supported environment; enhance industry awareness; and explore employer needs and expectations. 2022-23 will also see a greater focus on supporting students to engage with the *FutureMe* Career Discovery Tool. The tool is an online resource to support self-discovery and career exploration.

The careers and employability team will also be exploring opportunities to present and deliver workshops at student residencies, inductions, or to whole course gatherings and to co-create career management interventions with academic staff.

Another area of development for the Career Team is exploring further the relationship between career development and mental health, reflecting on whether our career development interventions are also mental health interventions in partnership with the UHI mental health team. The focus will be on future service development and delivery.

Work is also continuing to develop employer mentoring and links with students and courses, for example:

- Future Creative (developed from the previous LevelUp programme)

FutureCreative is a transformative collaboration between UHI and XpoNorth Digital. It is designed to connect creative, heritage and digital students with professional networks and opportunities. The project builds on the work already achieved through the award-winning LevelUp partnership and features an increased level of strategic and development support. XpoNorth Digital will deliver a bespoke suite of workshops, advice and mentorship to help students integrate into the creative industries, explore new ideas and develop their professional networks. The programme is designed to be a fully digital package to enable students to engage regardless of location.

- Employer mentoring programme

Over the last five years there has been a continued growth in the depth and breadth of the UHI employer mentoring programme. The programme has been designed to provide students with the opportunity to access insights, advice and support from a professional working in their area of interest/study. In 2022-23 the programme will be available across the entire curriculum (creative industries will use the targeted FutureCreative programme). A significant growth aspect of the programme has been the diversity of mentors, representing SMEs, medium and large organisations from within our regional, nationally and globally.

4.2 The apprenticeship family

UHI's Work-based Learning Hub continues to support the partnership in the development and delivery of the apprenticeship family across our tertiary provision, including as part of the recent transition over to SFC for the funding and reporting of the Foundation and Graduate Apprenticeship programmes.

For Foundation Apprenticeships (FA), 2022-23 will see a continued recovery in enrolment numbers as this provision continues to take time to re-establish within the school senior phase following the significant pandemic disruption to our practical and work-based programmes. This includes significant growth this year in the newer SCQF level 4 and 5 frameworks at UHI Moray and continued success for the level 6 Healthcare, Children and Young People and Creative and Digital Media frameworks as part of an overall expected increase in FA credits of circa 70% versus last year.

For Modern Apprenticeships (MA), 2022-23 is a particularly challenging year for all providers given the contractual and funding constraints that have been placed on this programme by SDS in response to the Scottish Government's budget savings targets. This has happened during a time of significant growth in demand for apprenticeships in our region – particularly within the

construction, engineering and healthcare sectors, within the context of our high levels of employment.

For example, for the UHI consortium MA contract, demand in the 2022-23 SDS contract year (April 2022 – March 2023) is projected to significantly exceed our SDS contract allocation of 486 new starts by almost 200 additional places. We are forecasting to exceed our funding of just under £1.8m required to support milestone claims and travel for our existing apprentices (over 1,100 currently on programme) in February, with a total shortfall of around £500k expected by the end of March. UHI continues to work hard with our academic and employer partners to evidence the impact of these restrictions, request further funding from SDS, and liaise with the rest of the sector towards further engagement with SDS and Scottish Government.

For Graduate Apprenticeships (GA), 2022-23 sees continued strong enrolment numbers in our ground-breaking BA Early Learning and Childcare programme, with over 30 new enrolments in 2022-23 expected. This includes significant growth in demand among child-minders following work by the programme team to ensure the delivery model can accommodate the needs and self-employed circumstances of this key group. For our long-established Civil Engineering BEng (Hons) programme, recovery from the impact of the pandemic continues with progression from our Modern Apprenticeship pathway into degree level study remaining a significant pipeline into this GA alongside new students to UHI.

4.3 Commitment to national measures targets

Graduate destinations (HE): we now have three years of data from the new graduate outcomes survey. The survey is done 15 months after graduation and the latest cohort where we have data is for 2019-20 graduates. Of those Scottish-domiciled undergraduates who responded to the survey 96.2% were in work or study. The most recent surveys have been conducted during period of impact from the covid pandemic, however the proportions in work or study have remained relatively stable. The anticipated target for the 2022-23 graduates is 96%.

The latest data for graduates from full-time, first degrees who were in employment showed that 62% were in professional occupations, this is the highest proportion seen by UHI and will have been supported in part by the first graduates from the undergraduate nursing programme. The target set for the 2022-23 cohort aims to maintain around this level at 60%.

College leaver destinations (FE): destinations for full-time students against previous years continues to be challenging within the context of our changed external environment, high employment levels and continued decline in full-time enrolments.

While we don't yet have official figures for either 2020-21 or 2021-22, we expect that employment related outcomes will continue to enjoy recovery owing to the greater levels of employment opportunity currently being experienced in our region across several key sectors.

For 2022-23, we are therefore expecting a very slight increase in the proportion of full-time college qualifiers in work and/or further study 3-6 months after qualifying, up to **94.0%**. However, given the continued expected decline in full-time enrolments, and much greater emphasis on part-time provision for our region in comparison to the sector norm, we expect this will equate to around **1,910** qualifiers in real terms.

5 Equalities and inclusion

Our 'Daring to be different' 2021-25 strategic plan is built around our core values of collaboration, openness, respect and excellence. Each value reflects the essence of equality and diversity, where we aspire for everyone to feel a sense of belonging.

New EDI developments are underway covering a range of areas such as compliance, engagement, awareness and culture. These developments will incorporate our values and demonstrate our commitment to EDI. Each area below highlights our key priorities for the remainder of the academic year.

- Legislation requirements and compliance - we will be reviewing:
 - How we report our Public Sector Reporting Duties, the next update report will be April 2023.
 - Our EDI policy for staff and a new policy developed for students.
 - The Equality Impact Assessment process with guidance and training available for staff
- Leadership and commitment:
 - UHI has reset the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, reviewing membership and gaining representation from fundamental areas of the business. Greater diversity is required for this committee and ongoing efforts will be made to progress this during the year.
 - Staff from HR, communications, HISA, student experience and senior management have been invited to support the planning, delivery, and implementation of EDI, ensuring EDI is integral to all that we do.
- EDI communication and engagement:
 - UHI will, for the first time, incorporate all relevant key diversity dates into the 2023 university calendar. This demonstrates our commitment to embed equality and raise awareness of events celebrated across a wide range of protected characteristics.
- EDI training and awareness:
 - We are finalising a range of training packages available to staff across all academic partners. This training will be delivered online with the option for bespoke face to face delivery. Training will cover general equalities, equality impact assessments, unconscious bias and inclusive leadership.
- Charters:
 - UHI currently holds bronze level Athena Swan. Athena Swan reflects our commitment to gender equality and our ambition to increase and promote inclusive working practices
 - Excellent work has been demonstrated as part of our Research of Excellent Framework.

Section 2: Outcome for economic recovery and social renewal

6 Responsive institutions

Institutions are responsive to employer and industry needs and to current and future skills requirements.

This section focuses on employer and industry skills engagement at a strategic and regional level which is supported by local engagement activities throughout the partnership. Strategic curriculum plans are being shaped by regional opportunities through city/region and island deals and underpinned by regional and national skills reporting and intelligence. Future tertiary growth plans will be informed by the work of the UHI2024 curriculum workstream.

The university is a key partner in the Island Deal, effectively the ‘anchor’ institution, recognising our obligation to support economic and social development in the Western and Northern Isles. The university is leading on a number of key Islands Deal projects in areas such as work based learning to support the transition to net zero and creativity and wellbeing, which aim to have a transformational impact for island learners, businesses and communities. Our Island Strategy was published in 2020 and is being implemented within a partnership approach with key stakeholders to ensure that the activities are aligned with the needs of our island communities.

6.1 Upskilling and reskilling the workforce

Regional FE

With employment remaining high, the expected increase in the number of unemployed people, or people at serious risk of unemployment, seeking reskilling support has not transpired in our region to the high levels anticipated. However, there were still significant upskilling and reskilling demands across our region throughout 2021-22, and which we expect to continue this year.

This includes support for key sectors across our region such as construction, healthcare, tourism, hospitality and food and drink, where employers continue to struggle to meet their workforce requirements following the impacts of the pandemic and Brexit. This is particularly the case where businesses previously relied on a high proportion of migrant workers or where employees have experienced a change in circumstances following the challenges of the pandemic and have decided to change career, take early retirement or pursue other opportunities.

During 2022-23, UHI’s ability to provide this support remains uncertain at this time, particularly given the continued delays to funding announcements and supporting guidance around key schemes such as the Flexible Workforce Development Fund (FWDF), restrictions to funding within the apprenticeship programme, and implications for Young Persons Guarantee. Despite this, our engagement with employer partners is ongoing to establish likely upskilling and reskilling demands, to continue to provide a range of CPD and short-course provision, and to prepare for funded training support later in the 2022-23 year as the situation becomes clearer.

For those in our region facing unemployment, support will continue, including as part of No-One Left Behind (NOLB) within the context of Local Employability Partnerships (LEPs). In addition to supporting those most in need and distant from work, there has been a recent increased focus for LEPs to support those who are able to work, or increase their working hours, such as parents and young people leaving education.

Examples of strategic regional initiatives

Key strategic developments, including city and regional growth deal activities, will continue to be progressed around our region as part of the continued development of our tertiary curriculum, research and KE footprint. This includes continued progress and developments in:

- Life Sciences Innovation Centre part of the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal supporting the university to increase research and knowledge exchange and provide greater support to the region's life science sector
- Aviation and aerospace sector, including MAATIC (Moray Aerospace Advanced Technology and Innovation Campus) within the Moray Growth Deal; continued sustainable aviation development as part of the SATE 2 (Sustainable Aviation Test Environment) project; the development of plans for the SaxaVord UK Space Port as part of UHI Shetland Campus Development within the Islands Growth Deal; and UHI involvement in the Moray and North Highland Space Cluster leadership group
- Net-Zero and Renewable Energy, including the development of a UHI Net-Zero Hub as a partnership focal point for our collective contribution to this key agenda; continued work with key stakeholders such as Energy Skills Partnership, SDS and HIE with regard to scaling up for the regions renewable energy skills needs as part of ScotWind, and plans for the development of new curriculum and training as part of the Islands Growth Deal TalEntEd programme and Opportunity Cromarty Firth initiative
- Work with industry partners in hospitality around our region, including the development of a Hospitality school in Perth and Kinross, the piloting of a new delivery model in Dornoch, and partnership work to enhance the development and cohesion of further education hospitality and cookery provision.
- Our Advanced Manufacturing offer, including through the Advanced Manufacturing Centre in West Highland and the development of plans towards green construction and advanced manufacture in skills provision, including as part of the Islands Growth Deal TalEntEd business case development
- Research within our marine, aquaculture and land-based sectors, including the Seaweed Academy at SAMS, a new Centre for Sustainable Seafood in Shetland, and peatland restoration

Some examples of response to employer HE skill demand and the recovery challenge

- STEM

Building science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) skills is vital to the future economy across our operating area and beyond. UHI has a key role in supporting our region to achieve its full potential, by offering access to STEM programmes and therefore providing an appropriately skilled workforce to drive the inclusive, long-term growth of the STEM industries. As a tertiary institution, UHI's strategy extends to support STEM at all levels, from outreach activity in early years and primary schools, through supporting secondary STEM curriculum and into further and higher education, including postgraduate, doctoral, and

postdoctoral training, research, and knowledge exchange. We continue to lead and develop the work of the regional Highlands and Islands STEM partnership.

Through work with industry partners over many months gift funding has now been secured that will enable sustainable STEM development over the next three years.

The recent Scotwind offshore leasing round resulted in the progress of 20 offshore wind developments totalling some 27GW of new renewable energy. Many of these projects are located around our shores. A range of activity is ongoing to ensure UHI is well positioned to support our communities including work to understand future skill requirements with for example the Scottish Offshore Wind Energy Council and industry contacts; aligning funding sources around sustainability and net zero; building relationships with offshore wind developers for philanthropic giving and student scholarship support. Examples of specific activities in 2022:

- Industry workshop focusing on floating and fixed offshore wind energy needs led by our newly established Knowledge Exchange Energy group and Powerhouse and OPITO
 - Connecting industry with our staff and students e.g., energy company involvement in the reshaping of undergraduate engineering curriculum; variety of guest lectures, projects and placements.
 - Reviewing curriculum needs e.g., around environmental impact and marine spatial planning to meet sector requirements.
 - Expansion of the UHI STEM outreach programme to primary schools across all the local authorities in our operating area. This has been possible due to a £900k funding boost from the offshore wind industry.
- Green economy

UHI Moray submitted a successful first-round bid to the Scottish Government's Just Transition Fund securing £210k. The funding will support a project to undertake current-state and future-needs analyses of educational provision; infrastructure development and knowledge and skills translation to address anticipated bottlenecks and gaps in the medium term.

This project has the potential to contribute meaningfully to UHI's programme of curriculum review and enhancement and will draw on experience and expertise from across the partnership. We are looking at the potential to develop a strong partnership bid for round two of the Just Transition Fund, which may include a programme of work to fully develop new curriculum, and to secure funding to develop infrastructure and estate to enable effective delivery

- Teacher education

From 2023-24, UHI will be offering the PGDE Secondary in conjunction with Aberdeen Council to meet demand for teachers locally following the withdrawal of the subject by University of Aberdeen.

- Department of nursing and midwifery

UHI has introduced two modules at SCQF level 9 and 11 in minor injuries management. This came about from an identified requirements for this training for general practice nurses and following a tendering process and agreement with NHS Education for Scotland.

- Use of SFC Upskilling Fund

In 2022-23, we are continuing to focus on the key sectors identified from our market intelligence and skills publications - digital skills; business, leadership and management skills; health sector support; mental health and wellbeing awareness and net zero. Using feedback from the previous year, we have also created a new course based on the popular R programming language for data analytics. This has been offered at a SCQF level 11 however student feedback identified potential demand for a lower-level course, the new Get Ready for R for data analytics will be offered in January 2023.

6.2 Fair work

The university's Fair Work Assessment was completed in November 2022 and gives the basis for action required to further develop the policies, processes and support aligned to the five dimensions of the Fair Work Framework.

Although the assessment has yet to be formally reviewed as part of a strategic approach to the workforce, there are a number of areas of improvement named in the report that are already within the review phase internally, these include

- Reviewing our performance management processes to further support increased and positive dialogue between staff and their line managers. This will in turn support the ability to further analyse the outputs and measure the effectiveness on the university's people and productivity.
- Being clearer on the learning opportunities within the university and what resource is available to support this thus developing an ever-improving workforce and creating a clear view of the internal skills base.
- Full policy review. This is currently underway and will continue into 2023 in order to ensure the most effective and transparent policies for employees and the university.

The Fair Work assessment will now form part of the strategic discussion in relation to the future of the university's workforce. The following provides details of our alignment with the five dimensions in the framework:

1. *Appropriate channels for effective voice*

UHI has an active elected staff committee that meets regularly with key internal stakeholders to enable effective communication and input to people and wider organisational plans. In addition, we have a monthly all staff forum which enables staff to input and add to ongoing UHI plans.

Our Communications team annually review the delivery of our communications to ensure staff can give their views on the most appropriate way for messages to be presented.

2. *Investment in workforce development*

We have a Learning and Teaching academy which provides leadership support, mentoring and various academic delivery support programmes for staff. Our central workforce uses a newly developed performance review system to outline any development areas. Among other support all staff have access to LinkedIn learning programmes

3. *No inappropriate use of zero hours contracts*

We have a very small number of employees on zero hours contracts, mainly in the field of academic delivery. These few contracts are only used where appropriate and mutually agreed with the member of staff and hiring manager.

4. *Action to tackle the gender pay gap and create a more diverse and inclusive workplace*

The University of the Highlands and Islands is committed to promoting equality of opportunity for its staff. Our strategic aim is to create an environment with attracts and fosters the very best employees, and within which all staff feel their achievements are equally valued and rewarded.

Since 2009 we have seen our gender pay gap steadily reduce from 32% in 2017, 22% in 2019, 17.59% in 2022 and again to today's level of 13.31% and 11.09% (median), but we believe we can and should be doing better.

We have actively tried to provide an environment that has helped us increase our female workforce by delivering on the promise to improve our flexible working practices. In 2017 our female workforce constituted 57.8% of our overall workforce, this rose to 64.3% in 2019. In 2023, it is 63.32%.

In the last year, the university has undertaken a review of the executive team, and the total number of employees at this level has been reduced. However, at the same time the total % of female employees at this level has now been increased to 75% of the total (three female, one male) :

Metric	2022	2023
Mean Gender Pay Gap	17.59%	13.31%
Median Gender Pay Gap	11.09%	9.52%

5. *Payment of the real Living Wage.*

We are in the process of establishing a revised pay and grading system to replace our existing process. However, as we are currently in the process of a cross partnership organisational review, we are unable to implement this until the review outcomes are known.

That said, we currently do not have any staff that fall under the living wage and are working towards the real living wage.

7 Climate emergency

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

UHI has embarked on an ambitious response to the climate emergency and currently has several workstreams underway across the university partnership.

- Leadership Training

The university engaged with the Royal Scottish Geographical Society to develop and run a series of training and workshop sessions with attendees from the University Court, Foundation, Senior Executive Team (SET) and Senior Management Team (SMT). The purpose of these sessions was to:

- Reinforce the message that every organisation requires immediate, fast action at scale to comply with a number of imperatives, including legislative and financial.
- Understand the moral and legal imperative to respond to the climate emergency.
- Develop a realistic, feasible high-level sustainability strategy for UHI.

- Governance

Sustainability governance has been strengthened and expanded across the organisation, and sustainability also has a more prominent position within the corporate risk register. The university has created a new cross-partnership Net Zero Steering group, comprising senior managers from across the partnership, with each institution assigning an accountable person/people for Net Zero. This group will lead, advise, and drive change across the partnership. In addition, we have established a senior management group to drive the sustainability goals across all operational areas (including learning and teaching) of UHI.

These groups will support the existing cross-partnership Net Zero Estates group but widen the change programme and actions to move sustainability from being the focus of estates to encompassing all operational activities.

Finally, the university has increased its sustainability capability and capacity by assigning senior executive accountability for sustainability and recruiting a dedicated sustainability manager, who commenced employment in January 2023.

- Engagement

UHI supports and engages in a student-led, Green Champions Network. This student/staff group runs a programme of campus and community-based events and initiatives to engage and educate in all things green.

We are also taking a wider regional approach through engagement initially with sustainability teams from Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and the Highland Council. This collaboration looks to develop regional approaches to climate solutions and the sharing of best practices and resources e.g., the collaborative development of place-based sustainability training for staff within HIE and the UHI partnership.

- Strategy and Action Plan

UHI's current Carbon Management Strategy and Plan expires in March 2023, and we are developing a replacement sustainability strategy and action plan. The plan will contain the actions to be accomplished over the coming years, including setting emissions reduction targets, and implementing plans to meet those targets.

8 Knowledge exchange and innovation

Institutions focus and prioritise their knowledge exchange and innovation activity on Scotland's economic and social recovery.

During 2022-23, the university plans to continue to use the UIF in our sector-focused approach but with increased emphasis on activities aimed at supporting local, regional and national recovery from the impacts of COVID-19, as well as adjusting to the significant impact of the reduced access to European structural funds post-Brexit.

The university will continue to actively engage nationally with the Universities Scotland Research and Commercialisation Directors' Groups (RCDG). There has been significant change in the landscape in the past two years, including the ongoing review of UIF and SFC, and with publication of the Scottish Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation. We will continue to work closely with colleagues in RCDG and wider stakeholders to define the next phase of our collaborative initiatives.

We will continue to engage with the 'modern universities' group which is made up of the post-92 Scottish universities and chaired by the UIF Collaboration Manager.

Within our operating area, the university will maintain and expand our knowledge exchange network across the UHI partnership for each of the SFC UIF priority outcomes. Each theme has a named champion who guides activities including interaction with other HEIs, local companies and organisations, local authorities, HIE, and the Scottish and UK Innovation/KE landscape, e.g., Interface, the KTP programme, the Scottish Innovation Centres, Converge Challenge, Innovate UK, UKRI.

For 2022-2023, as with previous years, some initiatives will be funded primarily from the Outcome Grant element of UIF. These are focused on key sectors for the Highlands and Islands region and our wider operating area, namely aquaculture, energy and health (active health and well-being and the Scottish Rural Health Network). The UHI entrepreneurship development project will also be funded from the Outcome Grant. Additional support through core Platform Grant funded resource has also been employed to develop KE activities in the creative economy, tourism, and water quality innovation.

Each of the UIF funded projects have their own internal targets and key performance indicators aligned with SFC's seven desired priority outcomes. These aim to provide sectoral hubs with business development and coordination resources as well as funding for business engagement activities such as events, promotions, meetings and a challenge/seed corn fund. The internal targets and key performance indicators also demonstrate commitment to helping Scotland achieve its green recovery ambitions, a well-being economy and just transition to a net zero carbon society.

Innovation vouchers:

The university aims to maintain the challenging target of completing ten Innovation Vouchers during 2022-23. As last year, we plan to use some of the UIF outcome grant to supplement newly won IVs with an additional £2,500 per voucher (for the first ten Vouchers awarded) to cover pre-grant award activities such as business engagement, project planning and application writing. This approach appears to be working as a means of incentivising researchers to submit more project proposals

A summary of the UHI UIF Plans for 2022-23, including priority outcomes is provided as an appendix, along with the 2022-23 UIF plan – targets and budgets document.

Section 3: Outcomes for research

Research excellence

Research sustainability: institutions ensure they protect their world-leading research programmes against the impact of COVID-19.

9 Research excellence and sustainability

9.1 Research excellence

REF21

REF results were announced in May 2022 and overall UHI's performance was very strong. The university significantly enhanced our 2014 REF position and consolidated our standing as a research-credible and research respected institution. UHI's overall grade point average increased from 2.76 to 2.96. This was supported by excellent performances in outputs and, particularly, impact. Research environment scores were not as strong and showed some decline since 2014:

- For research outputs, our overall performance increased from 2.66 and 2.89 GPA. There was significant improvement from our 2014 performance particularly with the proportion of 4* outputs which rose from 11.05% to 25.63%.
- For research impact, our overall performance increased from 2.99 and 3.30 GPA. Again, there was significant improvement particularly in the 4* performance which rose from 12.2% of total impact results assessed at this level in 2014 to 49.43% in 2021. This is an especially good outcome given the mission of our university to have impact on communities within the region and beyond.
- For research environment, our performance was less strong, with an overall decline in GPA from 2.91 to 2.70.

Looking at the individual units of assessment, there are some very strong results in a number of areas. The universities four largest units saw significant improvement compared with 2021:

- Unit 3 Allied Health Professions, Dentistry and Nursing (School of Health and Social Care, including Department of Nursing and Midwifery and UHI Inverness): *Doubling of 4* outputs and impacts.*
- Unit 7 Earth Systems and Environmental Science (SAMS, Inverness, North Highland, Orkney and Shetland): *Doubling of the 4* research outputs*
- Unit 15 Archaeology (Orkney, Outer Hebrides): *39.1% 4* outputs*

- Unit 25 Area Studies (Orkney, Shetland, Inverness, Moray, Perth, SAMS, West Highland): *100% 4* research impact*

The three other units also had some positive points: unit 26, Gaelic saw 4* outputs rise from 13% to 20%. While Unit 28, History reported an overall decline, the proportion of 4* outputs rose from 6% to 15%. Unit 23, education, was an entry level submission and no direct comparisons can be made.

9.2 Research sustainability

In terms of the funding, including REG, the university will ensure investment in the REF2021 research areas as a way of building further capacity, and continuing to lever ongoing research. A proportion of the funding will be retained to support the university's research office and the development of the research environment.

9.3 Research environment and culture

Research environment is a clear area for focus in the years ahead. This includes aspects such as

- Staff development
- The concordats
- Research student training and education
- Equality, diversity and inclusion
- Research income
- PhD studentships
- Research infrastructure and capital spend

There is already existing work to build on especially in relation to training and education for research students. We will also need to consider carefully how we migrate from a dependency in some areas on European, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and City region deal funds to research council, commercial and charity funding.

In our REF submission and other interactions, we have signalled our clear intention to follow and apply the principles of the Researcher Development Concordat. We have undertaken a mapping exercise which indicated significant points of coverage against the concordat principles but also some gaps. Due to our partnership structure, actions to address gaps institutionally will be taken forward through a focus on collective HR processes. However, we are already taking forward further work to develop and stimulate colleagues' understanding of the research environment, and what is needed to ensure that this environment for our research active staff (and particularly ECRs) is healthy and vibrant.

Work completed in 2021-22 on the research environment included the approval of a 5-year funding package for UHI funded PhD students, joining with the national ECR network, the appointment to a postgraduate developer post, several visits from senior staff from the research councils/UKRI, and showcasing our research output to external audiences. A number of grant writing workshops have been completed, notably within the health area.

In 2022/23, a comprehensive programme of activity to support the development of the research environment has been devised and endorsed by the senior executive team. This will be built into budgeting for the remaining years of the REF cycle. Part of this supports the first of the new cohort of fully funded research students as they begin their studies. A research staff training survey has been completed, and building on existing arrangements, an enhanced programme of staff development will be created and rolled out. The university will run its biennial research conference for staff and students at UHI Moray in January 2023. An enhanced programme of sabbaticals commencing in 2023-24 is also envisaged, as well as further investment in equality, diversity and inclusion.

9.4 Two REG case studies

Viking assembly-sites: identifying early democratic institutions for the benefit of the public and local organisations:

This case study focuses on Viking-Age assembly-sites, which are outdoor courts and parliaments, in Scandinavia and Scotland. Professor Alexandra Sanmark's research and excavation of these assembly-sites has revealed many new sites as places of early democracy for the first time. This has benefitted the public and organisations in Scotland, Sweden, and Norway through integration of the research results into public information for visitors, tourist-guide training, and school programmes. In these ways, this research has helped to improve economic prosperity, cultural life, and education.

Sanmark identified and studied over 50 assembly sites in Sweden, including Anundshög, one of the most extensive and archaeologically important sites in the country. Her excavations at this site revealed several unique features. These included a 200-metre-long wooden monument that enclosed the sacred assembly site and also marked a royal ceremonial route that passed the site. Another 'first' was the excavation of a thirteenth-century assembly cottage, presumably used for the signing of legal documents. This is the earliest example of such a building at an outdoor assembly site. As a result, Anundshög has had increased local council funding for school visits, a café, and guided tours in Swedish and English attracting investment of more than £3m. It has also contributed to the cultural heritage value of the site. More than one million visitors have benefited directly from this research and many more indirectly through media coverage, exhibitions and education.

The REG funding is highly important as it supports staff time to write funding applications needed to carry out large research projects, such as the one described here. This funding contributes to FEC, which allows us to create a 'tapestry' of funding sources, consisting of both smaller and larger grants.

Improving community engagement in the Scottish uplands by influencing policy

This previous UHI research, led by the Centre for Mountain Studies, identified key benefits of engagement for both community resilience and the sustainable development of upland estates in Scotland which has had significant influence on Land Reform Policy in Scotland. As a result, policies that regulate land management now emphasise mutual engagement between landowners and communities, and government guidance that draws on the research is given to landowners on how to meet these requirements. The research has also informed the policies and practice of Scottish Land and Estates and the Scottish Land Commission enhancing engagement and generating positive impacts for both communities and landowners.

Since devolution, a key area of policy for the Scottish Government has been land reform, which may be characterised as an ongoing process intended to modernise Scotland's system of land ownership. The research included: extensive participant observation by researchers on estates; over 200 hours of recorded interviews and discussions with estate representatives, community members, and other stakeholders; and a postal survey, completed by private estate owners who collectively owned 688,000 ha (1.7 million acres) of Scotland's uplands. From the outset, the project placed a strong emphasis on stakeholder engagement. This included the involvement of an advisory board of representatives from both estate communities and the land-owning and land management sectors before and throughout the project, and presentations to the Scottish Government and stakeholder groups as it progressed. Broadly, this research provided an understanding of the most important ways in which owners and managers of large, rural estates influence those who live and work on and around their estates.

This case study shows that the impacts of the research took place over an extended period of time, in alignment with land reform policy developments. The underpinning research activity took place between 2007 and 2012 with key publications produced in between 2012 and 2014. The research influenced the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016, as described and then also the development of the Scottish Land Commission and the Guidance on community engagement produced by Scottish Government in 2018. This is illustrative of the long-term nature of policy development.

To maximise research impact on policy development, there is a requirement for continuous support for dialogue, knowledge exchange and stakeholder engagement beyond the time frame of the research activity itself to ensure that it can be used effectively and in the appropriate contexts. The REG grant is essential for supporting the trajectory of research related to ongoing land reform policy development. The grant supports time for researchers to engage in discussions and knowledge exchange processes that ensure that research evidence is taken up in ways that support decision making. This may take the form of writing research summaries, attending cross-party working groups, and responding to consultations. The contribution of the REG grant to staff salary costs continues to allow us to track the development of this policy area, ensuring ongoing engagement and supporting staff between externally funded research projects.