

<b>Committee</b>	Board of Management		
<b>Agenda Item Number</b>	13		
<b>Date paper prepared</b>	27/09/2023	<b>Date of committee meeting</b>	04/10/2023
<b>Subject</b>	UHI Islands Strategy		
<b>Author</b>	Jane Lewis		
<b>Action requested</b>	For review and feedback		
<b>Purpose of the paper</b>	The draft revised UHI Islands Strategy is presented for review and feedback.		
<b>Brief summary of the paper</b>	The current UHI Islands Strategy has been reviewed through the Islands forum and a revised strategy developed to align to the new UHI Strategy and to reflect the changed context since development of the original strategy		
<b>Consultation</b>	UHI Principals with Islands remit, Islands Forum		
<b>Resource implications</b>	Will inform UHI resource allocation to Islands		
<b>Risk implications</b>	Revised strategy is required to reflect current context. Previous strategy was developed pre COVID and early in Islands Deal development and now is dated.		

<b>Link with strategy</b>	Links to all parts of the college strategic plan
<b><u>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion</u></b>	n/a
<b>Island Community Impact</b>	n/a
<b>Paper status</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Open</b> – The paper may be circulated to non-members of the committee and published online without restriction. <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Restricted</b> – The paper must not be circulated to non-members or published online until after the committee meeting. <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Confidential</b> - The paper must not be circulated beyond the committee members and should not be published online. [Please note papers may still be subject to Freedom of Information requests – see below].
<b><u>Freedom of information</u></b>	Choose an item. If closed/ withheld, select date this will become 'open': Enter a date.

## University of the Highlands and Islands Strategy

2024-2029

### Draft for consultation

#### Preface

This is an exciting and energising time for Scotland's islands given the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, the National Islands' Plan and the Islands Deal programmes. But there are significant challenges too such as the impact of COVID19 on the economies of the islands, the impact of climate change and projected population decline, especially in the Western Isles. The shape of education and research in the islands must be informed by both these challenges and these opportunities. As the only University with a physical base and delivering a tertiary educational offer within each of the island groupings, UHI is inspired to deepen its engagement in the islands in order to make an incisive contribution to the sustainable and inclusive development of the islands in new and innovative ways.

By utilising our strengths in further education, higher education, research and knowledge exchange, both within and outwith the islands, we will work with other stakeholders, taking a place-based, challenge led and research driven approach to key issues such as repopulation, workforce development in key sectors, the impact of climate change and talent attraction.

This strategy is an outward facing strategy, one that builds on the unique strengths and profiles of the islands. It is inclusive of all the islands within the UHI operating area and draws on our international connectivity with other island groupings around the world. It affirms too the growing importance of the islands' cultural and historical connections with Nordic, Arctic and near Arctic neighbours. It will facilitate stronger cohesion of our activities across the islands and will provide new opportunities for the island based academic activity to be at the centre for initiatives for the whole university and beyond. The strategy will also form the basis for the development of well formulated and evidenced based proposals for the Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Government in relation to the ongoing criticality of further education and apprenticeships to the islands' economies.

Key themes for the Islands Strategy include:

- ***A Skilled Workforce:*** Supporting the creation and retention of a highly skilled workforce across the islands, including nurturing entrepreneurial ambition and talent attraction;
- ***Impactful Postgraduate Learning and Research:*** Increasing postgraduate and research provision in culture, heritage, archaeology, marine sciences and creative industries;
- ***Implementing the Islands Deal:*** Contributing to the delivery of the Islands Deal Programme;
- ***Affirming Languages and Dialects:*** Supporting our islands' languages and dialects, including Gaelic;
- ***Sustainable communities:*** Attracting new activity and people to the islands and to be based in the islands.

Our commitment is that this strategy will have clear impact across the islands, and in the communities which are home to our staff and students.

Vicki Nairn, Principal and Vice-Chancellor (Interim), University of the Highlands and Islands

## **Introduction**

The strategy sets out how the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) will work with partners to extend and strengthen its activities across Orkney, Shetland, the Inner and Outer Hebrides, Bute and Arran.

The outcomes will be impactful, working with local communities to contribute positively to the sustainable development of the islands and transition to net zero, securing and attracting funding that will support local business needs and stimulate demand in key areas that will help attract new talent and create opportunities that reduces the need for people to move away, particularly for education and training. In order to deliver this impact, we will progress significant, purposeful and ongoing engagement with key stakeholders, including, but not limited to the Scottish Government, the Scottish Funding Council, Shetland Islands Council, Orkney Islands Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Highland Council, Argyll and Bute Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and Skills Development Scotland

We recognise that we have a public responsibility to make a significant contribution to the current national initiatives designed to strengthen island communities. These include:

- Our Islands: Our Future and The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018;
- The Islands National Plan and;
- The Islands Growth Deal.

In particular we recognise that we have a significant contribution to make to the Islands National Plan and the Islands Deal. We have a clear, long term civic responsibility to the Islands and we are an important part of the islands communities themselves. Priorities around sustainable economic development, climate change, empowered island communities, fuel poverty and education all tie-in to our academic and research specialisms.

In relation to the Islands' Deal this strategy maps closely to the core themes in a number of ways, including net zero carbon, economic development, tourism and heritage, skills, and supporting growth in key sectors.

This strategy also aligns with the UHI 2030 strategic plan and its core themes:

- Teaching, Learning and Student Support;
- Research and Innovation Impact;
- Enterprise and Growth;
- Environmental Sustainability;
- Operational Excellence.

We are the only institution of further and higher education, including also significant activity in research and knowledge exchange, that has physical bases in Orkney, Shetland, and throughout the Inner and Outer Hebrides, Bute and Arran. As such UHI Shetland, UHI Orkney, UHI Argyll, UHI North,

West and Hebrides and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig have prominence in this strategy, as it is primarily through these academic partners that the strategy will be delivered. However, strength will be drawn from other parts of the University's partnership. We will also seek to work in purposeful collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, including other universities where this will enhance the impact of the Islands, and this strategy.

### **The key elements and core objectives of the UHI Islands' Strategy**

#### **A Skilled Workforce**

***Key Theme 1: Supporting the creation and retention of a highly skilled workforce across the islands, including nurturing entrepreneurial ambition and talent attraction;***

***Key objective: To ensure that our curriculum at all levels aligns with identified key sector priorities in the islands, as determined by a range of stakeholders, particularly the islands' local authorities***

We will continue to review and develop our academic provision, across further and higher education, in line with the priorities of key stakeholders, notably the business community, the third sector, and the Local Authorities. This will enable us to make an ongoing strong, and purposeful contribution to the development of a skilled workforce across islands communities, especially in strategically important priority sectors for the islands, such as aquaculture, energy, renewables, construction, public services, including social work, and tourism. It also includes provision of skills development for both new entrants to sectors and the upskilling of the existing workforce in those sectors. Strengthening work-based learning (WBL) is at the core of our ambitions and we will work with key sectors to determine new pathways for learners, so they can make the optimum contribution to those key sectors across the islands.

Central to this commitment is realising a new and ambitious curriculum arising from the creation of UHI North, West and Hebrides.

We will build on our strong track record of working with key sectors to support apprenticeships at all levels. We are the only institution in Scotland to deliver the family of Foundation, Modern and Graduate apprenticeships, ensuring that learners can benefit from work-based learning from the senior phase of school through to honours degrees. We will grow sustainable WBL pathways across all key sectors, aligned to economic development opportunities, for example in energy and renewables. Close partnership working with employers and local industry stakeholders is at the centre of the delivery of our apprenticeships and broader vocational and work-based learning programmes and we will ensure that provision meets island workforce planning priorities and supports sustainable community development, not least by ensuring young people are given the opportunity to develop meaningful learning and career opportunities without leaving their island communities. A regional partnership community of practice informs and supports WBL development and delivery, ensuring the strengths of our university's partnership are realised and contextualised in local delivery.

This is even more relevant and important in the context of the ongoing period of public sector austerity, and potential resizing of public authority activity. It also aligns with the work underway across UHI to define a standard approach to further education curriculum review and a regional strategy for further education. Whilst this is not islands specific, the portfolio review process is explicit in the requirement for meaningful engagement with stakeholders to agree skills development priorities on an on-going basis.

There are a number of specific elements to this work:

- We will work in full collaboration with other stakeholders in the ‘islands’ ecosystem’ – The Scottish Government, Local Authorities, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Skills Development Scotland – in order to deliver a skilled workforce for sectors key to islands’ economies. Specifically, we recognise that we have a significant responsibility to implementing a programme of work which focuses on:
  - *retaining skills* (i.e. ensuring new entrants to the workplace and the existing workforce in the islands have access to opportunities and can take advantage of high-quality jobs in sectors key to economic development);
  - *developing a careers pipeline for young people.* (ie progressing our ongoing work with schools, including pre-senior phase and senior phase, work which will dovetail with our apprenticeships programmes, and our further education and higher education provision more generally.)
  - *attracting talent;*  
(i.e. from outwith the islands aligned with key investments helping rebalance populations)
  - *transforming skills*  
  
(i.e. build the skills of a mature workforce to ensure the forecasted replacement demand requirement is met across a range of occupations and address the workplace changes driven by automation and technological advancements. This includes transition and mentoring for those undergoing career progression and the encouragement of a culture of lifelong learning in the workplace)
- We will embed metaskills and graduate skills in our curriculum, in both further and higher education, including WBL. These are skills such as self-management, social intelligence and an innovative aptitude, skills which recognise that a flexible and adaptable workforce will be required to support sustainable islands’ economies;
- At higher education level, we will strengthen work-based learning within our degree portfolio as part of our provision;
- We have significant further education capability in a wide range of subjects in each of the island groupings, but now we will work to strengthen the cohesion of this provision across the islands through strengthening ways in which students can interact with each other in their learning through the use of various technologies. This commitment aligns with our leadership of TalentEd project the Islands’ Deal workstreams. As part of this we will extend shared delivery for Further Education students across the islands. This work will provide new opportunities for students to be exposed to a wider range of learning opportunities, work experience and an enhanced sense of geographical inclusion, including for learners based in small islands. A particular focus here is the link to the ‘Digital Islands’ concept and the desirability for all students to have well developed digital skills and understandings;
- The islands are creative, innovative and entrepreneurial places, rooted in enterprise. We will work to strengthen an entrepreneurial underpinning to all of our activities in the islands, and in particular innovation and sustainability will run through the curriculum at all levels.

### **Impactful Postgraduate Learning and Research**

***Key Theme 2: Increasing postgraduate and research provision in culture, heritage, archaeology, environmental sciences and creative industries;***

***Key Objective: To increase student numbers on a wide range of distinct postgraduate programmes in the humanities and marine sciences which provide students with a unique insight into aspects of natural and cultural heritage in the islands;***

***Key Objective: To increase the amount of islands based research and knowledge exchange activity across a wide range of subjects across arts, humanities, sciences and social sciences***

We have developed a range of taught provision at postgraduate level which provides participants opportunities to engage with the cultural fabric, languages, dialects and heritage of the islands at depth. Taken together these courses provide a comprehensive and truly unique package of opportunities for academic study into the islands, hence raising the profile of the islands at national and international levels and with a particular focus on Nordic and Arctic connections. Much of this provision is delivered online and students can access the courses anywhere in the world. Some programmes provide opportunities for short residential 'schools' in the islands as part of the programme of study. We will keep the existing suite of programmes under review and new programmes will be developed, potentially including subjects such marine spatial planning, digital connectivity, climate change, and coastal environmental living.

As part of this strategy, we will develop an associated marketing strategy aimed to profile these courses more strongly and attract even greater student numbers, including international students. We understand that the availability of student accommodation in the islands is often a significant barrier to growing student numbers and we are committed to working with stakeholders to identify and deliver innovative solutions to this issue.

We will also expand our programme of short courses, and other flexible learning opportunities, including, for example winter and summer schools aligned to existing provision, and existing academic conferences such as the biennial international St Magnus conference run by the Institute for Northern Studies in Orkney and Shetland.

We recognise that there are a wide range of issues and challenges within the islands including, for example, the impact of climate change, carbon storage, health and well-being in island communities, the state of the Gaelic language, the utilisation of natural resources, energy, renewables, aquaculture, sustainable economic growth, and demographic change in the islands. As a response to this, we will secure new sources of grant income, where appropriate in collaboration with other universities and stakeholders in order to further develop research and knowledge exchange projects of various kinds across the islands, hence attracting a range of research professionals, including postdocs and lecturing staff. This will include developing knowledge exchange partnerships and opportunities for innovation vouchers to be drawn down involving the university and business in sectors key to the islands' economies.

We are also committed to increasing opportunities for new research students across the islands as research students often elicit new understanding of place-based issues and challenges. Currently there are a significant number of research students associated with our islands' research Centres and Institutes, as well as at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. The newly established Centre for Sustainable Seafood in Shetland provides further opportunities. Building on what has been achieved over the last few years, there is significant potential to expand the number of research students and the geographical spread of these.

Much of current research activity and postgraduate provision in the islands focuses on the humanities and the marine environment and is organised through our islands' based Centres and Institutes:

- The Institute for Northern Studies,
- The Agronomy Institute,
- The Archaeology Institute,
- The Centre for Islands Creativity,
- The Centre for Sustainable Seafood.

In addition to these Centres and Institutes Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the national centre for Gaelic language and culture, is an academic partner of the University.

In the University more widely there are significant research strengths in environmental science, language sciences and in health, including remote and rural health provision. We will continue to work with communities in the islands to identify new ways in which research could be progressed in these disciplines, especially where this relates to issues of concern, such as the climate emergency, developing a sustainable 'blue' and 'green' economy, the identification of solutions to the delivery of health care in island settings, and the current state of the Gaelic language and culture. In addition to the contribution of our islands-based research centres and institutes, we will continue to work with our mainland based centres and institutes to draw in expertise for islands-based research initiatives, for example from the Environmental Research Institute, the Scottish Association for Marine Science, the Centre for Health Research Innovation, the Institute for Biodiversity and Conservation, the Centre for Living Sustainably and the Language Sciences Institute.

Over time, as the number of research students and research professionals in the islands increases, we will, within existing structures, support the development of an islands' graduate collaborative, an informal network designed to recognise the distinct nature of being a research student within the islands' environment. We will also keep under review our overall research offer, and will continue to work to secure new opportunities relating to key sectors such as hydrogen and energy engineering where there is opportunity for research grant income to be generated along with the development of corporate partnerships with onshore and offshore wind developers.

All of this work will lead to the production of an islands' research publication, which will demonstrate how the University's investment in research is impacting specifically on island communities and contributing to finding solutions to island issues.

We will develop a net zero hub which will be a single portal for all of our research and knowledge exchange activity related to our environmental sustainability commitments. This hub will include research and knowledge exchange activity generated in the islands.

### **Implementing the Islands Deal:**

***Key Theme 3: Contributing to the delivery of the Islands Deal Programme;***

***Key Objective: To make an impactful contribution to the aims of the Islands Deal Programme.***

We recognise the significance of the Islands Deal programmes and the impact these will have across the Northern Isles and Outer Hebrides. We are committed to working with stakeholders and partners both as leaders and participants in a number of islands deal programmes, especially where



these align with the objectives of this strategy and the wider objectives of our university. We also recognise that whilst these programmes are important in their own right, they will also provide the foundation for significant additional leverage for future developments. Further the islands deal projects link closely with all of the other parts of this strategy and we therefore view these as integral to the success of the strategy.

Specifically, we are committed to leading four projects:

- 2 Projects to support campus developments at UHI North, West and Hebrides in Stornoway and UHI Shetland in Lerwick and Scalloway. These will support the creation of contemporary learning facilities which will attract and retain a wide range of students.
- The TalEntEd Islands Programme. This project will focus on fast-tracking the decarbonisation of the islands by creating opportunities for education, skills, entre and intrapreneurship and commercialisation supporting the increase in sustainable 'green' jobs across the Northern isles and Outer Hebrides. We are committed to leading this project working with Robert Gordon University and Heriot-Watt University.
- The Shell-volution Programme. Led by UHI, the Shell-volution project has been designed as a new and innovative technical programme, enabling future growth in the low-carbon and sustainable mussel farming sector in Shetland, and more widely in Scotland. Through a phased programme of research and development, focusing on better ways to farm in the marine environment, the project will lead to a significant growth in output.

We are committed to making a contribution to two other Islands Deal projects:

- The Orkney Community Vertical Farm project is focused on agricultural innovation, creating an islands' vertical farm. The project will be supported by associated research and development activities and business incubation opportunities at the Agronomy Institute in UHI Orkney.
- The Creative Islands Wellbeing Project will establish new island networks of creative practice hubs and wellbeing innovation, including in relation to healthy ageing. We are committed to connecting with this project through UHI North, West and Hebrides, UHI Orkney and especially through the Centre for Islands Creativity at UHI Shetland.

#### **Affirming Languages and Dialects:**

***Key theme 4 : Supporting our islands' languages, including the Gaelic language, islands dialects and Nordic culture***

***Key Objective: We will work in partnership with key stakeholders to develop an integrated approach to Gaelic learning, research and development along with Island dialects and Nordic culture***

We recognise that we have a responsibility to support the revitalisation of the Gaelic language and culture in Gaelic speaking communities, especially in the Inner and Outer Hebrides. We are also committed to championing the cultures, dialects and languages prevalent in the Northern Isles.

Whilst the world of Gaelic is evolving rapidly with a new generation of learners and speakers emerging, especially across urban Scotland, traditional Gaelic speaking communities continue to experience socioeconomic and sociolinguistic pressures to the detriment of the wellbeing of their

language. Within our academic partnership, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI as the National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture, UHI North, West and Hebrides and the Language Sciences Institute are extensively involved in supporting Gaelic in a variety of ways.

We will support and affirm a range of projects and initiatives in the Outer and Inner Hebrides all aimed at strengthening Gaelic in community and in the economy. This includes ongoing research and community engagement in the Outer Hebrides, involving our Languages Sciences Institute, and provision to strengthen Gaelic skills for employees working in key sectors in communities, for example in education and health, the creative industries sector and in social care. In relation to Gaelic medium initial teacher education, we are mindful of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's decision for Gaelic medium education to be the default position in the islands and will reflect this in our curriculum planning. In addition, we will work with Ceòlas in South Uist to develop provision there in relation to music, language and cultural activities, especially within the context of the Cnoc Sollier initiative.

Our Institute for Northern Studies seeks to rediscover, preserve and interpret local culture for future generations with a particular focus on the languages and dialects of Orkney and Shetland as well as the history and culture of Scottish Islands and the North Atlantic Rim. We have a solid foundation from which to build and grow research activity and international collaborations with northern and Nordic neighbours.

### **Sustainable communities:**

***Key theme 7: Attracting activity and people to the islands and to be based in the islands***

***Key objective 7: We will work with partners to support opportunities for meetings, conferences and exhibitions that attract people to the islands; and where aligned with island priorities attract other organisations, businesses etc to be based have staff within the islands.***

We are committed to attracting people to the islands through our core teaching and learning and research activities. We acknowledge the barrier of securing accommodation for students and staff and are committed to working with stakeholders to find innovative solutions to this.

Academic related events, meetings and conferences and short courses provide opportunities to raise the profile of the islands, for people to travel to the islands and for the strengthening of connections with people and place in order to generate opportunities for collaboration, knowledge exchange, research and innovation across the islands. We are also strongly positioned to support the development of online connectedness to islands through our online and hybrid learning teaching models.

Through our programmes of further and higher education, we are committed to work with business and the public sector in the islands to attract people to the islands in order to provide a skilled workforce to support business and economic development.

In addition, we will support the islands' economies through attracting new business, inward investment and through the location of our own administrative and academic activities based within the islands. This will create opportunities for new jobs, clustering and financial investment.

### **Progressing the UHI Islands' Strategy; Leadership and profile in the islands.**

In order to progress this strategy, it is essential that there is bespoke leadership, good stakeholder engagement, a strong sense of collaboration across the islands and a conduit to the Vice-Chancellor

of the University. There are a number of key strands to ensuring that this strategy is implemented and that progress is monitored.

- The University's Principal and Vice-Chancellor will nominate a senior member of the University with corporate responsibility for championing this strategy and to ensure that there is a direct conduit to the senior leadership of the University. It is anticipated that this officer would have profile and presence across all of the islands. This officer will have a key role to further develop a strong sense of cohesion and collaboration in close liaison with the islands' academic partner principals and other senior staff. The islands' academic partner principals will have a key role to ensure that the specific local issues are fully reflected in the roll out of the strategy and implementation plan;
- The University will appoint a full-time Head of the Islands Strategy, who has a lead responsibility for liaising with internal and external stakeholders to ensure that this plan is progressed and reported upon. The Head of the Islands Strategy will report to an internal Islands' committee consisting of the academic partner Principals from each of the islands' academic partners, an islands' skills co-ordinator, together with the University's Vice-Chancellor or nominee;
- We will establish in partnership with key stakeholders an Islands' Forum which will meet twice a year in order to monitor and support the implementation of this plan and the definition of further workstreams which strengthen the University's work and impact in the islands. The terms of reference and membership are attached as appendix 1;
- Aside from our islands based leaders and academic staff, there are a number of pan university professional service staff based on the islands. We will implement a strategy of to increasing the number of core staff based in the islands especially as vacancies arise and are filled;
- It is recognised that this plan is a high-level strategy, and as such, it will be important that a detailed implementation plan will be prepared demonstrating how the strategy will be progressed over a five year period.
- The full economic and social impact of COVID 19 is very significant, and accordingly as with all universities in Scotland there is ongoing significant financial pressure on our university, a situation that is likely to prevail in the medium term. Notwithstanding this, we will make every effort to deliver this strategy and the commitments within it.

#### Key performance indicators over a five year period

- Growth of student numbers, across further and higher education, especially emphasising work based learning; 5% year on year growth in HE (undergraduate and postgraduate), 100% meeting FE credits and apprenticeship targets each year. 100% of students have an opportunity to engage with work-based learning within five years
- Growth of research and knowledge exchange activity and income by 15% over a five year period;
- Increase number of business engagements in the islands by 5% over a five year period;
- 100% of courses with content related to climate change and environmental sustainability by 2029.

**Appendix 1****University of the Highlands and Islands/Islands' Local Authorities Forum****Terms of Reference and Membership***Terms of Reference*

1. To agree an action oriented UHI islands strategy, reflecting further education, higher education and research and knowledge exchange, with a key purpose of increasing activity and investment in the islands;
2. To receive updates on the implementation of the UHI islands strategy, especially in terms of its impact;
3. To provide a forum to connect workforce planning and talent attraction to the activities of the University in the islands, including branding and marketing activities;
4. To deepen partnership between the island Local Authorities and UHI, especially in the sense of an ongoing understanding of the key strategic priorities, opportunities and challenges of the islands and how the University can best respond to these;
5. To consider how best the University can make an effective contribution to the Islands Deal;
6. To strengthen the 'voice' of the islands' academic partners within the wider University.

*Membership*

University of the Highlands and Islands Principal and Vice Chancellor

University of the Highlands and Islands Deputy Principal

Academic Partner Principals from UHI Shetland, UHI Orkney, UHI, North, West and Hebrides, UHI Argyll, and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig

Chief Executives/Directors of Children's Services/Education and Economic Development from Shetland Islands Council, Orkney Islands Council, Highland Council, Argyll and Bute Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Head of Universities, Education and Skills, Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Service Development and Delivery Manager (Orkney, Outer Hebrides and Shetland) and Skills Planning Lead – Highlands and Islands, Skills Development Scotland

Lead Officer Islands' Deal

Islands Policy and Communities Expert, Scottish Government

Chief Executive of Bòrd na Gàidhlig

#### *Frequency of Meetings*

Twice per year – one online meeting and one 24 hour seminars to occur at one of the UHI island academic partners

#### *Reporting Arrangements*

This is a forum, not a formal committee, but outcomes and activities will have visibility within the Local Authorities and the University.