

## **Regional Strategic Body Self-Evaluation Questionnaire**

The University of the Highlands and Islands is the Regional Strategic Body for further education across the Highlands and Islands and Perth and Kinross. This document provides a self-evaluation of the Regional Strategic Body's performance against its responsibilities, as defined by the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013. The evaluation is not an evaluation of the full breadth of the work of the University but rather limits its consideration to activities relating directly to further education. Unlike other regions, the responsibilities of the University of the Highlands and Islands, as Regional Strategic Body, are limited to activity up to and including SCQF level 6. In order that a full response could be given to each section of the questionnaire, the activities of the University relating to childcare, articulation and widening access, have been included, although much of this work falls out with the scope of the Regional Strategic Body.

### ***1a. What are the mechanisms for establishing the needs of students and employers in the region?***

At a regional level, the University has representation at a senior level on the Highlands and Islands Skills Investment Plan (HISIP) Programme Board, a group established to develop and monitor progress against the HISIP Action Plan. Members of the HISIP Programme Board represent the local authorities in the region, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, SDS, SCDI, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and NHS. The group reports to the Convention of the Highlands and Islands (COHI) and seeks to collectively develop and deliver against a strategy to support regional skills development that is responsive to demand and underpins regional economic growth.

The group draws upon data commissioned by SDS (Skills Investment Plan/Regional Skills Assessment data) and surveys commissioned by HIE to inform its deliberations and action planning. Partners listed above also feed intelligence on local developments to the group, on an agency by agency or local authority area basis.

Each academic partner takes the lead in building relationships and playing an active part in Community Planning Partnership arrangements. In the case of Argyll College, this participation extends across several community planning partnerships. For others, such as Moray College, Shetland College, Lews Castle College and Orkney College, this is a simpler relationship between one college and a single community planning partnership. Perth College has membership of the Perth and Kinross Community Planning Partnership, making use of the Tayside Regional Skills Assessment data to inform curriculum planning. In the Highland local authority area, three UHI colleges (Inverness College, North Highland College and West Highland College) work collaboratively with the Highland Community Planning Partnership, rotating representation on the CPP Board while each are activity engaged in the CPP sub-committee structure.

Academic partner principals come together regularly to share intelligence on local developments and progress against the HISIP Action Plan and these updates are fed into the Highlands and Islands regional update through representation on the HISIP Programme Board.

The University has recently created a senior post with responsibility for coordinating the University's response to strategic developments. This post is key to ensuring that the University is able to draw upon its collective resource in a coherent manner to offer optimum support to substantial economic development opportunities. The post holder is taking a lead role in relation to City and Local Area Deals as well as industry-focussed developments such as Spaceport in Caithness, Liberty in Lochaber and Boeing in Moray.

In addition to the arrangements described above, academic partners have local arrangements in place to facilitate communication between employers and each college. This interaction supplements the higher level interaction with CPPs and takes place at a variety of levels and encompasses:

- proactive engagement with employers to grow Modern Apprenticeship contracts and CPD;
- participation of employers in groups established to support curriculum staff, ensuring the on-going currency and relevance of courses in terms of content, quality management and delivery mechanisms;
- employer-led projects as well as facilitation of partnerships between schools and employers to support development of Foundation Apprenticeships and in the longer term, workforce planning.

As described above, the region has a clear focus on student destinations and makes best use of its tertiary span to support students in offering seamless progression across all SCQF levels. The University has a well-developed Students Association that spans all academic partners. Student representation systems and mechanisms to support student engagement are well developed and students have a role in the highest levels of both executive and non-executive decision-making.

The Quality Forum has worked in recent years to harmonise quality management processes across the region. In 2018/19 academic partners have agreed to the development of standard quality assurance processes across the region and this work is now well advanced. Quality enhancement processes are well-aligned across the region but are locally defined. Both the activity of the Quality Forum and that of the Single Policy Environment Project, has introduced, in recent years, a higher level of consistency to the student experience across partners.

Each academic partner makes use of a strong evidence base to inform evaluative reflection to inform planning. The Regional Strategic Body participates alongside Education Scotland in Evaluative Report and Enhancement Planning meetings at the pre-endorsement stage. Endorsed reports and action plans are regionally shared.

Regional groups at executive level (Quality Forum, Senior Management Curriculum Team, Partnership Council) and non-executive level (Further Education Regional Body, Court) monitor progress against regionally established targets (published in the Regional Outcome Agreement) relating to strategically targeted activity (disadvantaged groups/key industry sectors), student satisfaction and student performance against a range of measures.

### ***1b. How are these regional needs used to plan regional provision?***

The University partnership makes good use of local and regional labour market information and student trend data to propose regional targets that underpin regional and local curriculum planning. These targets are negotiated with The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) through the Regional Outcome Agreement development process. Academic partner principals come together to discuss the alignment of proposed targets with regional and local need, using local and regional intelligence and trend data to do so. During this process, the region's activity is benchmarked, not only against local and regional performance of previous years but also against the national context.

Partners make good use of RSA data and other labour market intelligence, collected through the mechanisms described in the previous section, to inform curriculum planning and regular portfolio review to ensure on-going responsiveness of their curriculum offer. Locally, curriculum mapping is carried out to ensure that the curriculum offers flexible access to students and clear lines of

progression to employment and higher education opportunities. In recent years, Tertiary Curriculum Mapping Groups have been established across subject groups to map the regional offer. These groups have been tasked to map access and progression opportunities, identify gaps and propose additional areas for development. They have also worked to rationalise course titles, simplifying, wherever possible, the offer and progression routes for students. A project has been initiated to develop an on-line curriculum mapping tool for use by students and prospective students needing to clarify routes to career and further study destinations.

In 2018/19 the region developed a regional Strategy to Support the Enhancement of Student Attainment. This strategy was developed in collaboration with all partners delivering further education to drive a coordinated approach to addressing the challenges faced by disadvantaged students and mainstream students with the aim of achieving ambitious student attainment targets.

*As yet, no standard regional systematic approach to curriculum review has been agreed across academic partners to give both academic partners and the Regional Strategic Body assurance that curriculum is well aligned to current and emerging skills development need across all communities within Highlands and Islands and Perth and Kinross. A proposed approach to this has however been discussed at SMCT with the intention of further exploration.*

**2a. Does the RSB have a robust, evidence-based plan to inform its strategy, the regional curricular offer, and the associated outcome agreements?**

As described above, the Regional Strategic Body interacts with partner agencies through formal mechanisms such as the HISIP Board to align its strategy and curriculum offer. Academic Partner strategies and local curriculum plans are aligned to the University's Strategy and informed by labour market information, not least regularly refreshed RSA data. The geographical spread and diversity of the region requires local strategy (albeit aligned at a higher level to the regional University of the Highlands and Islands Strategic Plan) in order that partners can continue to demonstrate the responsiveness of the curriculum offer to local economic and community development need.

*As yet, there is no formally agreed process to assure academic partners and the Regional Strategic Body of the alignment of academic partner strategies to the overarching University of the Highlands and Islands Strategic Plan.*

Regional fora such as the Quality Forum, engage in analysis of performance data across outcome agreements, benchmarking performance at the level of region, academic partner and subject against national data where this is available. A regionally maintained automated report gives academic partners live access to local and regional performance against ROA targets.

**2b. How does the RSB ensure the right provision in the right place across the region, making best use of college's resources and facilities?**

A Financial Memorandum is signed between each academic partner and the Regional Strategic Body. This mirrors the Financial Memorandum between the Scottish Funding Council. The financial memorandum specifies the need for each partner to secure 'high quality further and higher education provision'. Furthermore the Financial Memorandum requires each academic governing body to ensure that funding is used 'economically, efficiently and effectively.' The need to have the right provision, in the right place, making best use of college's resources and facilities is implicit in these requirements.

In 2018/19, as part of the process of Regional Outcome Agreement development, in line with Scottish Funding Council conditions of grant, each academic partner has asked to undertake a formal

consultation exercise with community planning partnerships with which they engaged. In adopting a local approach to consultation, the Regional Strategic Body aimed to engage with each CPP offering opportunities for agency partners, in particular local authorities, to scrutinise regional plans and the proposed local contribution to implementation of these.

**3. Are there coherent and connected regional responses on specific provision, including:**

- **Foundation Apprenticeship Programmes?**
- **Early Learning and Childcare Expansion?**
- **Developing the Young Workforce offer, including partnership working with local authorities?**
- **Flexible Workforce Development Fund?**
- **Widening Access?**

The Regional Strategic Body established the UHI Work-Based Learning (WBL) Hub in 2016. Sponsored initially by SDS, the UHI WBL Hub provided regional co-ordination of Foundation Apprenticeship contracts, working with academic partners to grow this provision in response to the national agenda. The WBL Hub initially supported early pilot programmes across a small number of partners but quickly expanded provision across more frameworks and a greater number of partners. In the first two years of its operation, the WBL Hub supported the region to deliver more than 25% of the Foundation Apprenticeships delivered nationally. The WBL Hub has relieved academic partners of much of the administrative burden associated with the contracting process, liaising on behalf of partners with SDS wherever possible. The Hub has also helped partners to come together in a single contract to achieve the necessary economies of scale to minimise the potential negative impact on performance scores that can arise when operating on a micro scale. The Hub has supported the development of communities of practice across Foundation Apprenticeship frameworks to ensure curriculum development is undertaken collaboratively, avoiding unnecessary duplication of effort. Academic partners have also worked across CPP boundaries to broaden the Foundation Apprenticeship offer in rural and remote areas through technologically-enabled delivery. The regional Foundation Apprenticeship provision continues to grow across all academic partners.

Our academic partners are in regular discussion with employers within our region in relation to the expansion of early learning and childcare to identify their needs, workforce planning and local demand for suitable qualified professionals. The university has additional funded places for HNC and BA Childhood Practice. The 2018-19 allocated increase in these places, especially for the HNC, was out-of-step with what employer-defined demand. Local employers were not expecting this level of increase in unfilled vacancies for suitably qualified professionals. Where there is an increase in demand, many employers are concentrating on upskilling existing employees and converting part-time employment to full-time. This is evidenced in the increase in interest in SVQ 2 and 3.

Wherever there is demand from applicants and employers, we work across the region to find flexible ways to make that provision available. For example, the university partnership was successful in bidding for funding from the Men in Early Years Challenge Fund to pilot a fast-track childcare course targeted at men in a bid to tackle gender stereotypes and encourage more people into the profession. The pilot is at SCQF L6 and successful students will be guaranteed an interview to the university's HNC Childhood Practice. Perth College UHI has also delivering the HNC Childhood Practice over one year to staff employed in the local sector through a route that sees them undertaking SVQs in their workplace and the college delivering the HN units online with twilight sessions on campus.

More recently the university successfully bid to run a pilot graduate apprenticeship in this area, which has generated interest from employers across the region.

The region plays a significant role in the region's 'Developing the Young Workforce' offer. This is managed locally with each academic partner managing relationships with local authorities relevant to them. In the case of Highland Council, three partners (Inverness College, North Highland College and West Highland College) work collaboratively with the local authority to co-ordinate a Highland senior phase offer. This is technologically enabled where opportunity arises.

The region overall dedicates a far greater proportion of its credits to the senior phase offer than is the national norm. The national percentage of credits dedicated to senior phase pupils studying vocational qualifications delivered by colleges in 2017/18 was reported to be 1.38%<sup>1</sup>. Regionally in 2017/18, 4% of credits were dedicated to this activity. Similarly in 2017/18 the region dedicated 13% of credits to school/college collaborative activity for pupils in S3 and above. Nationally this activity was reported as being 5% of total credits. The proportion of credits dedicated to school/college collaborative work varies significantly across the region, reflecting the differing role played by colleges in urban and remote/rural areas respectively. In the latter, a very high proportion of the college's activity can be dedicated to this work as local authorities and school draw upon the college staff and facilities resource to bring the required breadth to the curriculum. Although the Foundation Apprenticeship provision is significant and growing, this is only one strand of a much broader offer.

Although academic partners have developed local access and inclusion strategies, these have been developed in the context of regional discussion and mutual understanding of the challenges the region faces. Activity in relation to enhanced engagement with and improved attainment rates of disadvantaged groups is directed through a collaboratively developed regional strategy.

*The need to build on the success of the regional approach to curriculum planning and associated contractual arrangements exemplified by the work of the UHI WBL Hub has been recognised and work is underway through the newly formed Schools strategy Group to establish a regional senior phase offer, maximising the use of technologically enabled provision. This work is a priority for the region.*

A regional approach has been taken to the administration of the Flexible Workforce Development Fund bringing senior business development managers together to agree its operation. In 2017/18, the region managed to deliver training to the value of £576,743 to Levy-payers in the region, against a regional allocation of £898,297. In 2018/19 it is expected that this fund will be over-subscribed. In 2017/18 applications to the fund were approved at a regional level by a committee of academic partner and EO representatives. This process is now locally managed to give partners flexibility in their negotiations with Levy-payers but information is shared between partners using a SharePoint facility and reporting to SFC is regionally managed.

An evaluation will be undertaken with academic partners at the end of 2018/19 on the operation of this fund to establish whether it should be differently managed in 2019/20 should further funding be made available.

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Funding Council (2018) College Region Outcome Agreements Summary of Progress and Ambitions report  
2018 [file:///T:/Principals%20Office/VP%20Further%20Education/ROA%20Development/Colleges\\_Progress\\_and\\_Ambitions\\_Report\\_2017-18.pdf](file:///T:/Principals%20Office/VP%20Further%20Education/ROA%20Development/Colleges_Progress_and_Ambitions_Report_2017-18.pdf)

The university is committed to widening access and supporting disadvantaged learners into higher education. One of the key elements of this is the continued development of integrated tertiary pathways from school to further and higher education using academic and vocational routes to maximise opportunity. Through these pathways, we are delivering truly seamless supported learning journeys. Academic partners enhance the tertiary provision through relevant outreach activities promoting access to the most hard-to-reach individuals and groups, as well as working in partnership with relevant local organisations.

We are committed to improving access to our tertiary pathways across a diverse region which encompasses the specific challenge of rurality and rural deprivation. The development of an online curriculum mapping tool will make these pathways more visible and relevant to prospective and current students, employers and influencers.

The university recognises that admissions is a vital aspect of widening access to higher education. We are in the unique position of being able to offer a wide range of entry points into the learner journey making us a highly accessible institution to all groups of prospective students irrespective of background or life circumstances. This includes opportunities for articulation for our own HN students and those from other Scottish colleges, with advanced standing where appropriate, to degree programmes, as well as extensive use of Recognition of Prior Learning. Our published entry requirements are set at the minimum required to successfully complete a programme and do not present an unnecessarily high (selective) barrier for applicants. The university's contextualised admissions processes have formalised our inclusive approach to applicants. Contextual data is used to assess an applicant's prior attainment and potential to succeed in higher education in the context of the circumstances in which their attainment has been obtained. The development of the regional FE admissions policy builds on the HE experience and standardises practices for identification of protected characteristics at the point of application, guaranteeing interviews for some disadvantaged groups and provided learning opportunities for practitioner groups in terms of provision of support.

The university's regional marketing and communications practitioners group share and develop good practice on recruitment including targeting under-represented groups and addressing areas of multiple deprivation and rurality.

The university-wide care leavers and carers group is developing student support strategies and operational plans for students across the region. Following, an institutional review of support for student mental health, a mental health lead practitioner role has been appointed to develop a regional student mental health strategy. Regional approaches to other priority groups are in development including veterans and estranged students.

### ***3. How does the RSB engage with its assigned colleges to agree their contribution to delivering the regional plan?***

Historically, the Regional Strategic Body has engaged with partners as a group to establish regional targets prior to commencing negotiations with SFC. Although academic partner principals agree a rationale for the regional targets each year, with the exception of student activity targets, disaggregation of targets to the level of academic partner has not been undertaken to date.

In 2018/19 academic partners and the Regional Strategic Body agreed to the disaggregation of Regional Outcome Agreement targets. The principles underpinning the disaggregation were agreed as follows:

- Responsibility for achievement of ROA targets remains regional;
- Disaggregation of any specific target is intended to clarify action required to contribute to the regional target rather than representing a transfer of responsibility;
- Targets will not be allocated on a simple formulaic split but will be informed by data trend analysis, development need and development capacity;
- Academic partners will lead on and participate in regional improvement strategies and initiatives;
- Academic partners will work on enhancement initiatives on a collegiate basis, facilitated by the Quality Forum, drawing on regional capacity for improvement;
- Action planning for improvement will encourage creativity and innovation at a local and regional level;
- Wherever possible and appropriate academic partners will seek to support the transfer of effective practice;
- Academic partners' action planning will work towards achieving parity of student experience across the partnership.

The disaggregation is intended to assist academic partner senior management teams and boards of management in identifying a clear line of sight from local activity to the regional outcome agreement targets. Partners will propose targets that will contribute to achievement of regional targets, with these being subject to further negotiation should that be required.

Agreement on distribution of credits is reached at Partnership Council and recommendations made to FERB for approval of the distribution of credits and associated funding. A separate Group, the ESIF Credit Operations Group agrees distribution of ESIF credits and negotiates adjustments as and required.

The Quality Forum has undertaken work in recent years to develop a more collaborative approach to enhancement activity, working to harmonise quality assurance and enhancement policies and procedures and to manage student satisfaction surveys and emerging data.

The Quality forum also took the lead in developing a consistent approach to the Evaluative report and Enhancement Plans required as part of the Education Scotland external review process. Senior curriculum managers also undertook to reference in the EREP high level regional strategies to which local enhancement activity was aligned with the aim of establishing a clear thread running from the ROA to local action planning.

In 2017/18 the region collectively developed a Regional Strategy for the Enhancement of Student Attainment. This strategy drew partners together to develop approaches to enhance mainstream student attainment and that of disadvantaged student groups. The implementation of this Strategy in 2019/20 will deliver further alignment of partner enhancement plans with the ROA.

The response to some targets, for instance improving attainment levels for students residing in areas of multiple disadvantage, will be managed on a cluster basis bringing together partners with SIMD10 post code zones in their catchment areas. Others, for instance improving the attainment of students with care experience, will be informed by the work of a partnership-wide community of practice where best practice can be shared.

The Quality Forum initiated in 2018/19 curriculum reviews in subject areas where attainment levels were low. This was the region's first attempt at collaborative cross partnership evaluative work of performance at subject level in further education. The region plans to build further on this work in the next academic year.

#### **4. What steps are taken to ensure that efficiencies are maximised within the region?**

The requirement for each academic partner to achieve value for money, to be economical, efficient and effective in its use of public funding is explicit in the financial memorandum between the University and its academic partners. Notwithstanding this expectation, the Regional Strategic Body strives to facilitate further efficiency gain through regional initiatives such as those described below.

During academic year 2018/19, the region launched the Single Policy Environment Project, to create a policy framework for FE that all partners delivering further education could buy into, thereby reducing duplication of effort in policy development, equalities impact assessment and policy review. This project has also helped manage risk across the partnership through better management of corporate knowledge (using a SharePoint facility to centrally develop and store policy and procedural documentation). As this knowledge tended to sit with individuals in partners, rather than with teams, as would be the case in larger organisations, the risk of service disruption should a member of staff leave for any reason was high. Now, through the development of communities of practice and partnership-wide development of a consistent approach, partners are better able to provide support to one another, should any temporary skills gap emerge in any one partner.

Policies have been developed through Policy Ownership Groups that bring together specialist practitioners from each partner. Each group has considered the current practice in each partner and, where potential has been identified, transferred best practice to all partners, enabling efficient implementation of improvements, saving each partner from a linear process of gradual improvement. Wherever possible, opportunities to automate systems on a regional basis have been taken.

The regional Quality Forum has worked to align quality management processes adopted by academic partners for a number of years now. In 2018/19 partners agreed to adopt a standard quality assurance and enhancement process and this is currently being developed. Again, this work is producing efficiency gain through reduction of duplication of effort and through speed of transfer of practice. Partners are encouraged to continue to explore creative approaches to enhancement activity but with the expectation that proposed systems change would be considered and adopted regionally rather than locally.

The development of a Foundation Apprenticeship contract, a regional Modern Apprenticeship contract and a regional Graduate Apprenticeship contract with SDS has helped to maximise efficiency gain for the region. In the case of Foundation Apprenticeships, through the development of a regional rather than individual contracts with SDS, partners have been able to achieve economies of scale in the presentation of their Foundation Apprenticeship numbers, avoiding undue financial penalty in the operation of contract performance management that can occur in very small partners where single student outcomes can significantly skew performance scores. Regional management of curriculum materials and sharing of delivery practice has also created efficiency gain as has regional contract management which has reduced the administrative burden on partners.

Further work has been undertaken to develop a regional approach to student data management, bringing MIS and Student Records staff together to develop and adopt a standard approach to management of student application, attendance, entering of results and curriculum planning. Through this process, partners have identified best practice within the partnership and built further on this to enhance practice further. This data management framework is in the process of being finalised and will underpin further projects such as the development of a regional dashboard

reporting tool and the development of on-line curriculum maps that will help current and prospective students navigate progression pathways to further study and employment destinations.

Enhancing retention and student attainment is key to maximising efficiency gain within the region in maximising the impact of each funded place on the lives of students and the economy of the region. To this end in 2018/19 the region collectively developed a regional strategy for the enhancement of student attainment to address challenges in attainment of mainstream and disadvantaged students. This strategy will drive enhancement activity in 2019/20.

*The region has achieved efficiency gain through central provision of IT network and VC services. The region recognises that further efficiencies could be gained through further development of shared services such as Finance, HR, MIS/Student Records and Quality Management and is committed to pursuing this agenda in light of the considerable financial challenges the region faces.*

### **5. Is the Provision across the Region Coherent?**

The regional strategic body has responsibility for provision of further education across a geography that comprises more than a third of the land mass of Scotland, spanning urban, island and inaccessible remote and rural communities. Given the diversity of contexts within which each college works, the curriculum across the region needs to balance local need whilst ensuring progression pathways extend beyond the local context, offering routes through further and higher education to employment and rewarding career opportunities.

Each academic partner takes a lead role in liaising with their community planning partnership and in making use of regional skills assessment, regional skills investment plans and industry sector skills investment plans to align local provision to local and regional need. In 2018/19, in line with SFC guidance, academic partners consulted with CPPs, with particular attention being paid to the local authorities with which they work on the proposed ROA for 2019/10 and the intended contribution the college would make to achievement of ROA ambition and targets. The requirement for each academic partner to assure itself of the effectiveness of its activity is written into the financial memorandum agreed between each academic partner and the University as Regional Strategic Body.

In addition to this local planning, the region is engaged in regional curriculum planning through Tertiary Curriculum Mapping Groups. These groups, organised around broad subject groupings have mapped provision across the partnership identifying pathways of progression. Through this mapping process, cross-partnership curriculum leaders have worked to ensure that progression from partner to partner is seamless and that any gaps in provision are identified. The work of the Tertiary Curriculum Mapping Groups has led to rationalisation of course titles and content, with the intention of bringing a greater level of clarity to progression opportunities for students.

The geographical distances that separate the academic partners of UHI, precludes competition for the most part between colleges for students. The new campus in Inverness has created a 'pull' in the inner Moray Firth but not to any significant detrimental degree. Any historic competitive practice for Modern Apprenticeship provision has been addressed through the development of a regional WBL Hub and single contracts for Foundation, Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships. Within the scope of these contracts, partners are working collaboratively to maximise contract size and value, placing apprenticeships according to demand rather than historic academic partner practice.

Clusters of colleges facing similar challenges of population change and geographical remoteness are beginning to work collaboratively to use the collective resource to develop a technologically enabled curriculum. The region anticipates that these nascent developments are indicative of the future of the UHI partnership with greater use being made of technology in further education to enhance the viability of courses in rural and remote locations.

In order to ensure on-going alignment of the curriculum and to address any intermittent development issues identified locally or regionally, the Regional Strategic Body is investing in an additional resource to be employed at a senior level to work on a peripatetic basis according to need. This resource will provide the partnership with means to drive change programmes across the partnership as well as address any specific concerns raised by partner agencies.

***6. Does the RSB allocate capital funding in a clearly prioritised way? Does it have an estates strategy that identifies future estates needs and current maintenance needs?***

The university has a ten year estates strategy which covers both further and higher education as the one estate is used for delivery of all levels of teaching. This strategy clearly identifies future estates needs and is updated on a regular basis based on changing priorities, condition reports and new activities across the partnership. The most recent version was submitted to Scottish Funding Council in August 2017. The priorities are set using Multi Criteria Decision Analysis software with all partners engaged in agreeing criteria and the outputs are shared across the partnership. Capital funding from Scottish Funding Council has been limited in recent years and has largely been used to fund high priority backlog maintenance. Funding of two outline business cases and one full business case from academic partners has been supported by contributions from both Scottish Funding Council and the university. The university has also provided capital funding from its reserves to enable some high priority capital projects at partners to proceed.

***7a. Does the region have an effective outcome agreement that clearly articulates regional need and links changes in funding to that regional need?***

The Regional Strategic Body takes an inclusive approach to the development of the ROA which spans further and higher education, engaging with senior staff and members of governing bodies from across the partnership in its development through executive-led workshops and discussions at the Further Education Regional Board and Court. Consultation with internal and external stakeholder groups have been led by academic partners.

The ROA details the region's response to national and regional drivers and links to academic partner Evaluative Reports and Action Plans where appropriate. Given the size and complexity of the region as well as the tertiary nature of the institution, to meet the demands of the guidance issued, the ROA for the University of the Highlands and Islands is unwieldy. The Regional Strategic Body would wish to move to a more concise form of agreement in future years that is more easily understood by stakeholders.

Additional funding that has been made available through European funding streams has supported the University in its response to demand for enhanced provision in specific industry sectors and growth in higher education numbers. Additional funding has supported the development of Graduate Apprenticeships at level 8 and 10 in Civil Engineering and an in-house bespoke work-based learning degree in Computing in collaboration with IBM. Specific funding streams have also supported the region in its development of local initial teacher education, nursing and midwifery.

In further education, student activity credits have been redistributed, to a degree, to reflect changing levels in demand at some partners. For instance, having struggled to meet its activity target for several years, Lews Castle College accepted an adjustment of 1,000 credits which were redistributed amongst Inverness, Shetland and West Highland Colleges. The distribution of rurality funding has also been adjusted to reflect SFC guidance, allocating this funding to those partners operating in the most remote and rural areas, attempting to maintain breadth of provision across a wide geographical area, delivering through multiple learning centres.

***7b. Does the ROA have robust targets for all the key measures, and is performance against those targets measured?***

The region takes an inclusive approach to the development of ROA targets, bringing academic partner principals and UHI senior managers together to consider performance trends and ambition. Targets are aligned to regional and national ambition and compare well to the national performance trends. Although the region performs very well against sector norms, targets reflect on-going ambition and a recognition that although regional performance is good, there are areas within which there is scope for improvement. The region has responded to the Scottish Government's ambition to eliminate the attainment gap experienced by disadvantaged students and has mirrored that ambition in its ROA.

The region monitors performance against ROA targets through a centrally generated reporting system, accessible by all partners. This report generates live information fed from the SITS student records system against ROA targets. Key elements of the ROA targets, for instance student activity core and ESIF targets are monitored on a weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual basis through the UHI and academic partner executive, UHI SMT, Partnership Council, FERB and UHI Court respectively. Performance against most targets in further education is only possible on an annual basis. This is undertaken by the above groups as well as the regional Senior Management Curriculum Team and the Quality Forum. Key performance indicators are analysed by the Quality forum to inform regional curriculum subject review activity to support regional subject action planning to enhance performance.

The Regional Strategic Body has further assurance of performance against performance indicators through local monitoring of performance undertaken by partner SMT and Boards of Management. Boards are actively engaged in external review processes and endorse EREP reports submitted to Education Scotland and SFC. The requirement for academic partner to have access to regular, timely, accurate and adequate information to monitor performance and account for the use of public funds is made explicit in the Financial Memorandum agreed between the University as Regional Strategic Body and academic partners.

The University intends to undertake an impact study of its performance in future years. This would necessarily be however, a comprehensive study considering the impact of the totality of the University's work, rather than a study of the impact of the work of the RSB which would impose an artificial distinction between the further and higher education activity and therefore not be reflective of operations.

***8. How is the RSB monitoring the performance of its assigned colleges in relation to:***

***a. Quality of teaching?***

The Vice-Principal (Further Education) meets regularly with the regional inspector from Education Scotland to discuss Education Scotland interaction with academic partners and any national

developments in external review processes. The region works with the Quality Forum to consider the regional approach to EREP and participates in EREP pre-endorsement meetings. The Regional Strategic Body receives copies of draft and endorsed EREP documents and these are shared with FERB members.

These externally validated self-assessments of performance are made in the context of robust analysis of current performance indicators and trend data. This local analysis is further supplemented by a regional analysis undertaken by Quality Forum of which all partners are members. In academic 2018/19 following this analysis, partners worked in partnership to undertake a regional review of subject areas where there was identified need for development, recognising the opportunity to work collaboratively to address common challenges and transfer effective practice wherever possible.

A key initiative in 2018/19 has been the development of a Learning and Teaching Review process for regional application. This LTR has been developed by Moray College, although it is very similar to processes already running at Inverness College and North Highland Colleges. It is being piloted at Moray and Argyll College in Semester two of academic year 2018/19 with the intention of wider implementation in the next academic year. The Regional Strategic Body is very supporting of such regional initiatives that are developmental in intent and closely linked to the UHI Learning and Teaching Strategy.

Many partners have Associate Assessors on their staff who are engaged by Education Scotland to participate in review activity across the college sector. The Regional Strategic Body has made use of this expertise to provide support to partners experiencing particular challenges and will continue to do so, not least through regional review at subject level.

#### ***b. Student achievement/attainment, including access and inclusion?***

As described above, the region, along with all academic partners, monitors performance in terms of student attainment, using national benchmark data wherever possible. Analysis of trend data has established that the region delivers a proportionate number of student activity credits to students residing in areas of multiple disadvantage and BME students that proportionately exceeds the representation of these groups in the regional population. Furthermore the proportion of student activity credits delivered to students with care experience far exceeds the national norm. As described above, performance is monitored through executive and governance groups and is reported regionally and locally by academic partner.

An area of difficulty for the region is the monitoring of local and regional performance in terms of the challenge of rural deprivation. Very few SIMD10 post code zones are represented in the region but the region has the considerable challenge of supporting students living in areas of rural deprivation for which there is no nationally recognised measure.

Having exceeded the national norm for delivery of student activity credits to recognised groups of disadvantaged students, the region is focussing its attention on eliminating the attainment gap for these student over the course of the current ROA. The region recognises the challenge in this agenda and has been proactive in developing a regional strategy, on conjunction with academic partners, with the intention of providing a regionally coherent response to these challenges and achieving a more consistent student experience.

#### ***c. Financial sustainability?***

Academic partner finances are monitored through regular reports to UHI SMT, Partnership Council, FERB and Court. Through the Financial Memorandum between the Regional Strategic Body and academic partners, assurance is sought that each college manages its activities to remain 'sustainable and financially viable...covering its costs and allowing for maintenance and investment in its infrastructure (physical, human and intellectual) at a level which enables it to maintain adaptive capacity necessary to meet future demands.'

Partners are required to advise the Regional Strategic Body as soon as they have concerns around their financial position which allows support to be offered at the earliest stage. Since the university took on the role of Regional Strategic Body in 2014 there have been several examples of financial and staff resource being offered to help sustain partners through difficult periods.

There is an ongoing focus on efficiency and financial sustainability across the partnership and we are aware that further work needs to be done on sharing resource more effectively and planning for the long term sustainability of each partner.

#### ***d. Quality of Governance?***

The Regional Strategic Body and each of its assigned colleges carries out an annual effectiveness review of its governing body and its senior committees. Every three years this assessment is required to be externally facilitated. The assigned colleges submit the report of their annual review together with the associated action plan to the Regional Strategic Body. The action plan is monitored to ensure it has been completed by the due date.

The Regional Strategic Body is responsible for the appointment of the chairs and independent board members to the boards of our five incorporated colleges. The Chair of the University Court and one other lay governor carries out an annual appraisal of the chair of these five colleges and the chair in turn is required, under their letter of appointment, to carry out an appraisal of each of the board members. No similar arrangement exists for the other 4 assigned colleges who are responsible for their own appointments and appraisal arrangements.

Each of the nine assigned colleges are required to advise the Regional Strategic Body of any issues or concerns relating to their governance arrangements through the financial memorandum with the Regional Strategic Body and the principal of each of these bodies provides an annual certificate of assurance to confirm that there are no issues.

#### ***9. How does the RSB support and ensure financial sustainability in its assigned colleges? What mechanisms are in place to support colleges (working with SFC as necessary) facing financial challenges?***

The Regional Strategic Body recognises that from time to time colleges will face financial challenge as a result of changing circumstances. At such times, the Regional Strategic Body has provided support, financial and through provision of executive support to help colleges overcome such challenges.

The Regional Strategic Body has for instance, recognised the need to use trend data (rather than any individual year's change in student activity) to inform student activity allocations and associated funding. Where particular challenge has arisen, the Regional Strategic Body has made transitional funding available to support a college in recovery or advanced funds where required. Where SFC guidelines have driven redistribution of funding (for example in the case of rurality and remoteness funding), several years transitional funding has been provided to support colleges needing to plan for budgetary change.

There have been a number of examples since 2014 where staff or funding have been provided to support a partner going through a period of difficulty.

**10. How does the RSB promote the use of the credit and qualifications framework to its assigned colleges?**

As a tertiary organisation spanning further and higher education, the University partnership is heavily reliant on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) to define locally and regionally map and promote its provision. Academic partners and the University in its totality have a standard approach to course definition in the use of on-line prospectus information that clearly identifies SCQF level.

Tertiary curriculum maps showing regional provision, illustrating pathways through to further/higher levels of study and/or employment opportunities are also structured by SCQF level. Individual partners make sure of credit-rating mechanism across SCQF levels to add value and transferability to non-accredited learning opportunities. Such mechanisms are invaluable in terms of the widening access agenda.

Overall, the region believes that the SCQF framework is fully embedded in the work of the colleges and the University.

**11a. Is the RSB efficient in its own operations (that is, is it minimising the amount of funding it uses for its own operation as opposed to funding provision); and is it promoting efficiency in its region (e.g. through reducing duplication, creating shared services or promoting structural change)?**

The funding allocated to the Regional Strategic Body to support provision of further education in 2018/19 was £46,670,964. Of this, the retention to cover Regional Strategic Body administrative costs which include £85,000 subscription to Colleges Scotland, regional committee costs and remuneration and salaries (Chair of FERB, Vice Principal Further Education, part-time PA, Data Reporting Services and the Single Policy Environment Project Manager was £346,206. A further contribution of £36,524 was made by the University to support the work of the Single Policy Environment in recognition of the tertiary nature of many of the policies being developed. The overhead cost of the WBL Hub was covered through SDS contracts. The operations of the Regional Strategic Body in relation to FE funding represents 0.7%- 0.9% of the total funding allocation to the region (depending on whether or not national bargaining funding is included in the calculation).

The Regional Strategic Body has established the WBL Hub to support single apprenticeship contracts for Foundation Apprenticeships, Modern Apprenticeships and Graduate Apprenticeships, which has reduced much of the contract management work undertaken by colleges. The WBL Hub has also developed communities of practice that supported shared development of curriculum materials and collaborative approaches to development of deliver mechanisms. The WBL has supported growth in contract value, and therefore income to partners, year on year, since its inception.

The region funds a post to provide central student data reporting services and this post is central to the on-going development of a self-service dashboard reporting tool using Power BI that will enable partners to make best use of data to inform enhancement plans as well as supporting local and regional monitoring or progress against organisational KPIs and ROA targets.

IT network services are centrally provided but although proposals have been made to develop shared services none have yet come to fruition.

During academic year 2018/19, good progress has been made in standardising student data management processes to support student enrolment, student attendance recording, recoding of results and curriculum planning using the SITS student record system.

In addition to this work the Quality Forum has taken a more rigorous approach to standardising quality management systems, working through Quality Assurance and Enhancement processes to reduce duplication of effort, bring greater levels of consistency whilst still encouraging creative approaches from which all partners can benefit.

The Single Policy Environment Project, launched in academic year 2018/19 has brought partners together to develop regional policies prioritising student-facing policies. The project is now moving into a second phase initially focussing on Carbon Emissions and Carbon Management and Health and Safety Management. This regional policy environment is building additional resilience through better management of corporate knowledge and creating a context within which partners can better support one another through temporary or longer term skills gaps. Benefits are also being realised through regional communities of practice for specialist and professional staff and through achieving greater levels of consistency in the student experience.

***11b. What analysis has the RSB undertaken to ensure that assigned colleges are operating efficiently?***

The Regional Strategic Body seeks assurance through the Financial Memorandum that academic partners are striving to achieve value for money and that they are economical, efficient and effective in their use of public funding.

*No specific analysis has been undertaken to ensure that individual assigned colleges are operating efficiently but assigned colleges are encouraged to share resource.* The single policy environment project, the offer of regional co-ordination and support on many compliance matters such as GDPR, equality and diversity, Prevent duty and provision of cohesive IT, telephony, student records and video conferencing systems are examples of where the Regional Strategic Body works to drive efficiency across the region.

***12. Are there effective relationships within the region? Is the RSB working well with its assigned colleges so that they see its value?***

Effective working relationships can be evidenced through the operation of regional executive structures such as:

- Partnership Council
- Senior Management Curriculum Team
- Quality Forum
- UHI WBL Hub

A review of decisions taken and initiatives driven through these committees and teams is indicative of the ability of the region to work collaboratively and productively. Agreement to work collaboratively to address, for instance, industry sector needs through strategic groups for engineering and computing (spanning all SCQF levels) illustrates the shared recognition that a regional approach and collaborative work is required if we are to realise the potential of the region. The region has agreements in place to work within a single contract framework for apprenticeships. The willingness of partners to work through the regional WBL Hub to agree distribution of MA places, in-year, to maximise the region's ability to achieve contract growth demonstrates the

maturity of these relationships and the key role of the Regional Strategic Body as facilitator in these arrangements.

Partners have also been appreciative of the outputs from the Single Policy Environment Project. The Regional Strategic Body has played the part of facilitator in policy development, providing project management support to enable partners to collectively create standard policies that are approved locally by governing bodies.

The Further Education Regional Board provides a forum for interaction between the Chairs of Academic Partner Chairs within which national and regional challenges can be discussed. FERB has delegated authority to distribute the regional FE funding allocation and has managed to secure agreement amongst partners for the distribution of funds to support FE across the region each year, implementing processes of re-distribution where required. FERB has taken a key role in achieving the correct levels of funding to support the implementation of national bargaining within the region.

The Regional Strategic Body provides additional interim support to partners experiencing difficulties. This support has taken the form of financial advances, transitional funding that temporarily allocated a greater proportion of funding to specific partners facing significant temporary financial challenges, mentoring support for key senior staff and challenge through provision of critical friends. The uptake of such support across a range of partners suggests that relationships are effective.

Although there are at times tensions evident in relationships between the Regional Strategic Body and academic partners or indeed between academic partners, these are indicative of the structural complexities within which the Regional Strategic Body and academic partners operate. The accountability of Boards of Management and that which falls to the Regional Strategic Body can create diverging agendas which can be, at times, difficult to navigate.

The costs of the Regional Strategic Body are minimal in relation to the funding allocated to the region. While this appears to be efficient, the lack of resource being directed to develop for instance networked provision in FE, fundamental to achieving curriculum breadth in more remote settings constrains regional responsiveness. Similarly, the Regional Strategic Body could add greater value through the development of shared services realising further efficiency gain with the potential for shifting more resource to core teaching and learning in doing so.

### ***13. How does the RSB, either directly or through its colleges, engage with:***

#### ***Staff unions and student associations?***

The Regional Strategic Body meets directly with representatives from trades unions recognised by academic partners through an information sharing group. Colleges themselves also engage with their recognised trades unions through local Joint Consultative Committees and through membership of the Employers Association that negotiates with trades unions on their behalf in line with the NRPA and National bargaining arrangements.

The region benefits from a single students association HISA, collectively funded by the University and its academic partners. Regional and local sabbatical officers work in partnership with regional and local management structures to facilitate student engagement. There are well-developed mechanisms supporting student engagement such as Partnership Agreements and well-developed formal systems of student representation.

#### ***Schools employers, local authorities and other post-16 education providers?***

As described in earlier sections, the region has well established regional and local engagement with that number of CPPs with which we engage. Engagement with schools is organised regionally and locally to promote pathways through HE and FE respectively. The complexity and size of the region necessitates local engagement as a priority and the high proportion of activity dedicated to school/college collaborative work is illustrative of the constructive nature of these relationships.

Relationships are developed through local partners with other post-16 providers to support articulation and access to higher education from the rest of Scotland. All formal arrangements, including franchise opportunities that have been developed are subject to regional scrutiny and monitoring.

### ***Other interests in its region?***

#### **National Manufacturing Institute for Scotland (NMIS)**

The university is engaging with this national initiative aimed at increasing the productivity of Scottish manufacturing industry. This initiative is *“an industry-led international centre of manufacturing expertise. Industry, research and the public sector will work together to transform skills, productivity and innovation.”*<sup>2</sup> In addition to the Renfrew centre, NMIS will work across the nation to deliver its mission. Uniquely UHI will be working simultaneously at college and university levels as a regional tertiary body. Through the recently formed NMIS steering group, UHI will coordinate its FE and HE engagement with NMIS and align its outputs to the requirements of the UHI region.

In practical terms with will initially involve:

- Academic Partners engaging with SDS and HIE to participate in the train the trainers programmes across the UHI region.
- UHI hosting the first of a series of upskilling training events for businesses and providing case studies and contextualised content.
- Coordinated applications for the Advanced Manufacturing Challenges Fund (AMCF) not only linked to ‘local’ business and UHI Academic Partners but also to the regional strategies of the university.

This work is being taken forward in conjunction with HIE and hopefully Scottish Enterprise, as their aims and that of the university and NMIS obviously coincide to a broad extent. In all discussion about the so called ‘triple helix’ of industry, public bodies and academia, it is clear that demand for skills and knowledge is aimed at the full spectrum of the SCQF (FE and HE) and that UHI is very well placed to meet this demand with its unique structure.

#### **Growth Deals**

The links between local, regional and national agendas spanning the full FE and HE spectrum is taken forward in other ways in UHI, one such being the **Moray Growth Deal (MGD)**. The university’s plans here include centres of excellence in enterprise, advanced manufacturing and aviation. The plans include work at school level to provide inspiration, highly innovative technician-level training and upskilling. It will also include, industry-focused research aimed at the next generation of technology applications. In all of this HIE is a key partner along with private companies including but not limited to Boeing. Other examples of this strategic blending of local and regional, linked to national approaches and delivered at both FE and HE include:

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<sup>2</sup> <https://news.gov.scot/news/national-manufacturing-institute-for-scotland>

- The UHI School of Health and Allied Life Sciences
- The STEM Hub and regional development of Newton Rooms
- The MAXIMAR consortium
- The Centre for Rural Creativity

***Are there enhanced stakeholder/employer engagement structures, providing a ‘one door’ approach?***

The university has a single work and enterprise strategy which provides the framework for a cohesive approach to employer engagement across the region. This is supported by a region wide Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform which allows partners to log activity and see if an employer has an existing relationship with any part of the university. A Key Account Director is employed to develop relationships with large employers, co-ordinating support and engagement across groups of academic partners.

Regular business development practitioner group meetings are held to share good practice and ideas and encourage consistency of approach.

A programme board for work and enterprise, chaired by the university’s chief operating officer and secretary, meets on a quarterly basis and comprises senior colleagues from across the partnership.

***Is there a cross-college Board collaboration on issues such as risk management, GDPR, cyber security and equality and diversity?***

The Regional Strategic Body has developed, with academic partners, an agreed list of 12 commonly recognised risks. Academic partners are able to add to these locally through a common software platform. This allows for full visibility of risks across the partnership and reports can be tailored as appropriate. The university and academic partners’ risk registers are considered by the respective senior management teams and boards of management, the UHI Risk Review Group, FERB and Court.

The Regional Strategic Body funds, through APUC, on behalf of the region, a data protection officer to work across most of the partnership (excluding Inverness, Shetland and Orkney Colleges) providing direction on GDPR issues to the University partnership.

The university’s Libraries and Information Services department co-ordinates information security activities and a single information security policy has been adopted across the partnership. Working together with IT staff across the partnership, the team have been successful in securing our Cyber Essentials certification in March for all aspects of our activity.

Whilst each partner reports separately on their Equality and Diversity activities, regular workshops and training sessions are arranged by our equality and diversity manager to share good practice and support staff across the partnership.

There are many examples of sharing good practice and policies across the partnership through a range of practitioner groups particularly in areas of compliance where there is no benefit in “reinventing the wheel.”

**Action Plan**

Action	Deadline
A regional schedule and process agreed for the development and alignment of regional and local strategic plans	January 2020

A regional structured approach to portfolio review to be agreed and implemented by each academic partner	June 2020
A regional senior phase offer to be developed that makes use of technology-enabled delivery where advantageous	June 2020
An annual regional review of provision in subjects where attainment is low to be undertaken to inform local improvement plans	January 2020
The potential for further development of shared services to be explored to create efficiencies and improve effectiveness	January 2020
A process by which an analysis of efficiency of operations can be undertaken across the region to be agreed and implemented	January 2020