

RGU | **ORKNEY**



2023-2028

The RGU Orkney story so far

There is a long history of **strong connections** between Aberdeen, Orkney and the far North and RGU is an important part of that story. Many Orcadians choose to study at RGU resulting in an extensive alumni and research network in the islands.

Building on its strong reputation as an **innovative, inclusive and professional focused university** and its mission to provide **excellent teaching, research and enterprise opportunities**, the University established RGU Orkney in 2018 working in partnership with local stakeholders to address a range of local social, economic and environmental challenges.

Based at the Orkney Research and Innovation Campus (ORIC), RGU Orkney currently employs a full-time Development Manager who plays a key role in coordinating the activities of RGU staff with local organisations in developing and delivering a significant range of projects and other activities. In 2021 a Project Manager joined the team to support the **growing portfolio of activities** in Orkney.

The initial areas of focus between 2018-2019 for RGU Orkney included:

- Project development workshops on the themes of Active Ageing, Smart Tourism and the Circular Economy attracting more than 100 local stakeholders.
- Use of £50k RGU pump priming funding for Orkney-related projects including polypharmacy, co-housing, mental wellbeing of farmers, autonomous vehicles, digital storytelling, nutrition for cancer survivors and 3D scanning.
- Additional support for island-based Graduate Apprenticeship students with 24 participants across 11 local employers between 2018-2023.

More recently, the portfolio of projects and activities that RGU Orkney has been involved with has grown significantly. This now includes the following highlights:

- Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme Projects such as **StoryTagging** (€1m) involving partners from Scotland, Northern Ireland, Sweden, Finland and Russia, working with creative SMEs to enhance their market reach and online presence through engagement with storytelling. Local musician Brian Cromarty was one of the grant recipients, creating a soundscape inspired by the story of Orkney's Energy Community.
- Interreg North Sea Region Programme Projects including **G-Patra** (Green Passenger Transport in Rural Areas) (€3.6m) and **Stronghouse** (€6.7m) a digital one stop-shop where owners can carry out a self-assessment to find out more about the energy efficiency of their homes.
- Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) project on **Augmented Fashion: Immersive Interactions for Sustainable Heritage in Fashion and Textiles** (£1.3m) bringing together a multidisciplinary team from Scotland and China to explore ways to educate the consumer about the sustainability, craftsmanship, heritage and value of traditional fashion and textile products, using immersive technologies, including partners from Orkney, Shetland and Harris.
- The **Islands Growth Deal** where RGU leads on the entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship strands of the **TalEntEd** theme. Working with island partners including the University of the Highlands and Islands and Heriot-Watt University, the TalEntEd programme will focus on fast-tracking the decarbonisation of the islands by creating opportunities for education, skills, leadership, innovation, entre/intrapreneurship, and commercialisation supporting the increase in sustainable green jobs. Support for the TalEntEd programme will include a new five-year RGU post likely to be based at ORIC.
- **University of the Arctic (UArctic)** RGU was successful in its application to join the University of the Arctic (UArctic) in May 2021 and the RGU Orkney Development Manager sits on the Board of the newly established Scottish Arctic Network (ScAN). Working with the University of Applied Sciences Lapland, RGU is developing a new UArctic Thematic Network entitled Active Lifestyles and Recreation in the North; is participating in the North2North Exchange Programme with the first exchange from UiT The Arctic University Norway, Faculty of Engineering, Science and Technology in April 2023; and participated in the Arctic Circle Assembly in October 2022 leading a session on Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) in partnership with University of Eastern Finland and University of Southern Maine. RGU Orkney will also host SCOTMAC III the Scottish Model Arctic Council in 2024.





It is important to emphasise that the achievements of RGU Orkney have been built on a strong commitment to **collaboration, co-production and partnership** with local stakeholders.

These relationships with Orkney Islands Council, NHS Orkney, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, HITRANS, EMEC, Aquatera, the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) and Heriot-Watt University (HWU) alongside other **local businesses, community groups and wider stakeholders**, have been key to the success of RGU Orkney and vital to our future ambitions set out in this document.

As one of three Universities with a presence in Orkney, we recognise the importance of working collaboratively, using our complementary strengths and different areas of expertise for the benefit of the local community.

The work of the RGU Orkney Development Manager, based at ORIC, has also played a key role in building this strong partnership approach and in the successful development and delivery of RGU projects in Orkney.

Local knowledge and wider engagement with organisations in Orkney are essential in ensuring the successful achievement of economic, teaching and learning, and research initiatives aligned to local priorities over the **next five years**.

RGU Orkney 2023-2028: key aims

Building on these successes and as we emerge from the pandemic this is now a key moment to consider the aims and objectives of RGU Orkney for the next five years. With the publication in 2023 of the Orkney Community Plan (2023-2030) and the Orkney Islands Council Plan (2023-2028), as well as RGU's refreshed University Strategy and a new Research Strategy, this provides an excellent opportunity to ensure that our activities closely align with both emerging local priorities and the University's strategic objectives.

In terms of the policy landscape, the Orkney Community Plan and the Orkney Islands Council Plan identify key areas of priority for **future social, economic and environmental development**. These priorities are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Orkney Policy Priorities

Orkney Council Plan 2023-2028

Strategic Priorities	Aims/outcomes
Growing the Economy	Reduction in poverty and disadvantage Create conditions for sustainable economic growth Work towards Net Zero by 2030
Strengthening Communities	Support development of local solutions Establish highest standards of public support and protection Widen access for better learning, achievement and wellbeing
Developing Infrastructure	Investing in homes and supporting choice and inclusion and focusing on better energy efficiency Removing barriers to the delivery of digital connectivity and vital transport Invest in strategic projects that advance economic ambitions

Orkney Community Plan 2023-30

Strategic Priorities	Aims/outcomes
Cost of Living	Reduction in poverty Mitigation of cost of living crisis Measures to address child poverty, food dignity and fuel poverty
Sustainable Development	Focus on the synergies between the development of a wellbeing economy and combatting the climate emergency
Local Equality	Improved digital and transport connectivity Improvement in population, demographic balance, resilience and wellbeing of Orkney's most fragile communities Improvement in the most disadvantaged communities



A key aim of RGU Orkney 2023-2028 is to ensure that we **align relevant academic expertise** to support the achievement of these policy outcomes.

We have **significant expertise** in smart technology connectivity, energy data management, sustainable housing, renewable energy and net zero, data modelling and data analytics, health and wellbeing and entrepreneurship and innovation that can be used to inform policy development and evaluate policy interventions.

RGU Orkney also has a very important contribution to make to the University's refreshed institutional strategy. RGU's mission 'to transform people and communities by providing excellent teaching, research and enterprise opportunities to contribute to economic, social and cultural development and environmental sustainability' is underpinned by 3 strategic priorities:

- To provide students with an excellent experience that will enable them to raise their aspirations and thrive in their professional careers as global citizens.
- To grow the quality and impact of our globally recognised, innovative and interdisciplinary research.
- To ensure that we contribute significantly towards Scotland's economic and social regeneration.

In addition, a new University Research Strategy approved in 2022, focuses on developing high quality interdisciplinary research with impact, aligned around 4 key themes: Environment, Energy and Sustainability; Health and Wellbeing; Living in a Digital World, and Inclusive and Creative Societies (see Figure 2). A cross-cutting theme focuses on the 'place agenda' and the ways in which RGU research is rooted in, and contributes to, the social, economic and environmental development of communities.

Interdisciplinary Research Themes

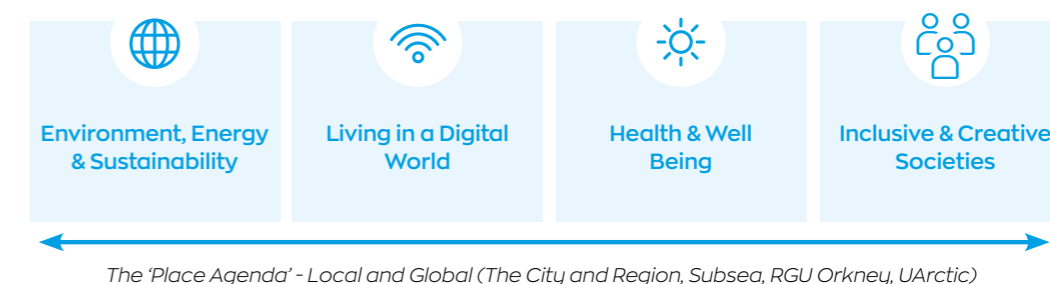


Figure 2. RGU Interdisciplinary Research Themes



A **second key aim** of RGU Orkney 2023-2028 must therefore be to ensure that it contributes to the University's overall strategic priorities as set out in the University's refreshed strategy and is aligned with the objectives of the University's Research Strategy.

RGU Orkney: strategic objectives and key priorities

Against this background of significant achievements since 2018, **strong partnerships** with local stakeholders, and clear alignment between RGU expertise and areas of strategic importance for Orkney in **the future**, this section sets out 3 objectives which will underpin RGU Orkney 2023-2028, highlighting key areas of priority.



Objective 1: Research and knowledge exchange that harnesses RGU expertise to address local challenges and opportunities in Orkney

As part of RGU's strategic priority to grow the quality and impact of its research, the University is committed to engaging in research and knowledge exchange that supports the **social, economic and environmental ambitions of Orkney** and will be of wider relevance to the Highlands and Islands and other remote, rural and island regions.

Working in **partnership with local stakeholders**, including UHI and HWU, we want our research and knowledge exchange in Orkney to be transformational, helping to inform the development of policy and practice, creating an evidence base for **informed decision making**, and having a positive social, economic and environmental impact.

Our key priorities over the next 5 years will include:

- ✔ To work with local stakeholders to secure external funding in support of interdisciplinary research, evaluation and knowledge exchange activity focused on Sustainable Recovery, Connectivity and Community Wellbeing.
- ✔ To establish a Centre for Social and Digital Innovation based at ORIC which will act as a focal point for place-based research and knowledge exchange related to meeting the challenges of service delivery and social and economic development using insights from remote, rural and island practice.
- ✔ To work with Orkney's International Island Games Committee to support the research and evaluation needs of this major event in 2025 through a collaborative PhD studentship, using our data and digital expertise to support ambitions for a smart Games that contributes to the sustainability agenda, and opportunities to gain support through the volunteering programme at RGU.
- ✔ To establish a presence for RGU's National Subsea Centre at ORIC to maximise opportunities for collaborative working with private and public sector organisations on shared priorities around the transition to net-zero.
- ✔ To grow the academic leadership and community of research staff and students in Orkney based at ORIC. To include collaborative projects and PhD studentships to support innovation.
- ✔ Draw on RGU's extensive experience in architecture and the built environment to support innovative responses to Orkney's critical housing challenges through research in smart, affordable housing and dynamic student projects.



Objective 2: Support the development of skills, educational and entrepreneurship opportunities in Orkney, aligned to the needs of local stakeholders, that offer an excellent student experience and support social and economic regeneration

Building on a **track record of success** in relation to Graduate Apprenticeships and student projects and placements, over the next 5 years, RGU will be focused on strengthening and enhancing its entrepreneurship, innovation and learning activity in Orkney in **partnership with local organisations**.

Our key priorities over the next 5 years will include:

- ✔ Delivering positive local impact through the Islands Growth Deal by working with collaborators across Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles, and leading on the delivery of the entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship programmes of TalEntEd.
- ✔ Continuing to seek out opportunities to grow the Graduate Apprenticeship programme and the number of placements in Orkney available to our students.
- ✔ Further develop collaboration with NHS Orkney in order to address workforce challenges, particularly through identifying future demand for health care skills and training as well as wider needs in relation to leadership and management skills.
- ✔ Development of short courses aligned to the needs of local stakeholders across a number of sectors, including Data Analytics in the fields of energy, tourism, health and business where there is an increasing need to upskill the workforce.
- ✔ To support local demand for training in management and leadership skills through programmes including the UK Government's Help To Grow Management initiative.





Objective 3. Creating an evidence base to influence and impact policy and practice in other island and remote rural regions, through innovative research and teaching programmes

The University will build on RGU Orkney's track record of **facilitating collaborative projects** and proposals in the islands to establish and develop activity, partnerships and projects in other remote, rural and island areas more widely across the UK and beyond, to help address economic, social and environmental challenges facing remote, rural and island communities (see Figure 3 below).

While RGU is already working in partnership to develop projects that benefit the Highlands and Islands region, RGU would also seek to **build collaborations, networks and projects** across the Arctic in particular, primarily through its membership of UArctic and the Scottish Arctic Network (ScAN).

Our key priorities over the next 5 years will include:

- 🕒 Building research networks with other UK and international universities who are engaged in research in remote and island areas.
- ✔️ Harnessing fully RGU's membership of and access to networks and partners through University of the Arctic.
- ✔️ Being proactive in seeking opportunities to grow research and teaching activity beyond Orkney through initiatives such as the Scottish Government's Arctic Connections framework and the Scottish Arctic Network (ScAN).

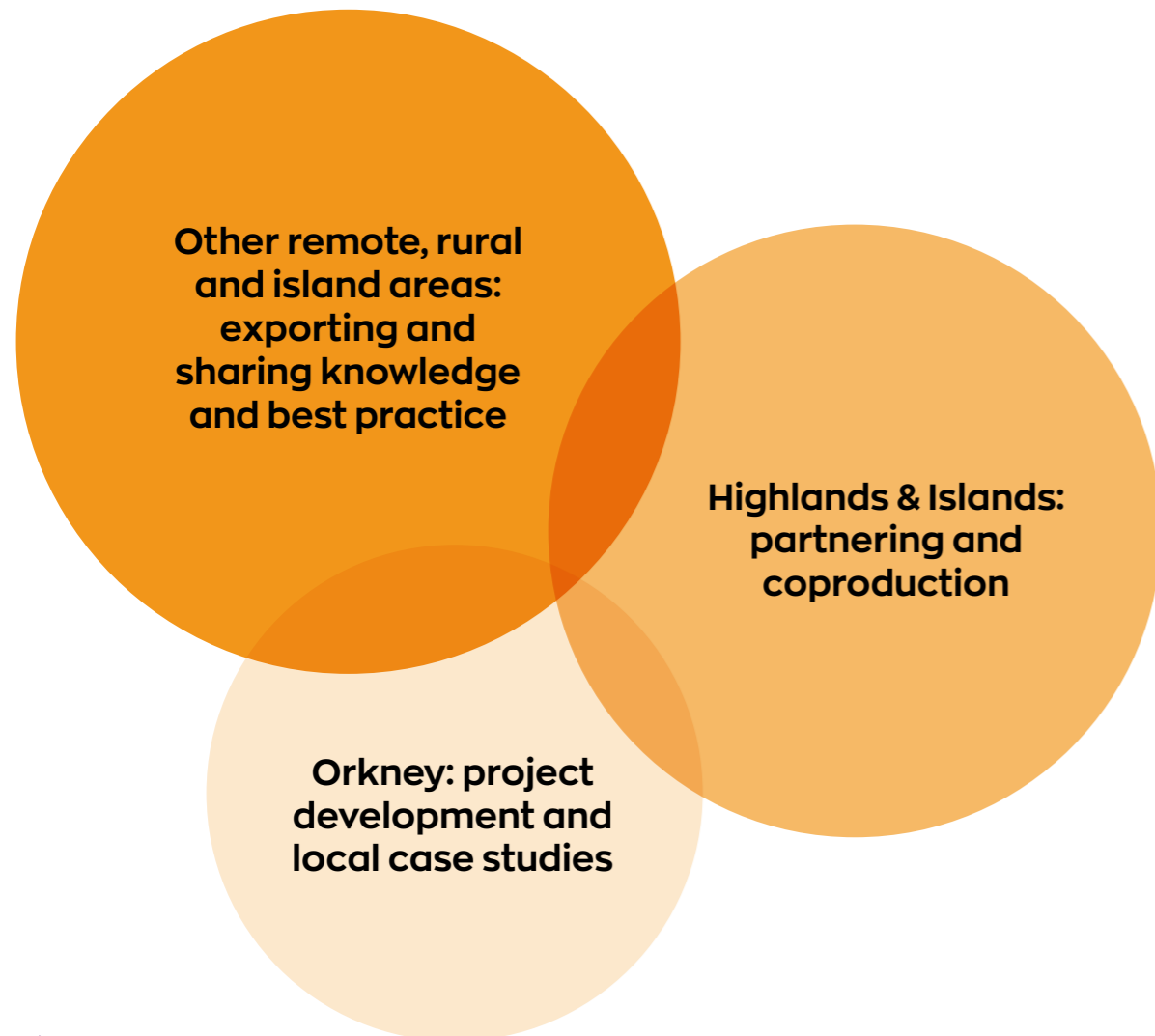
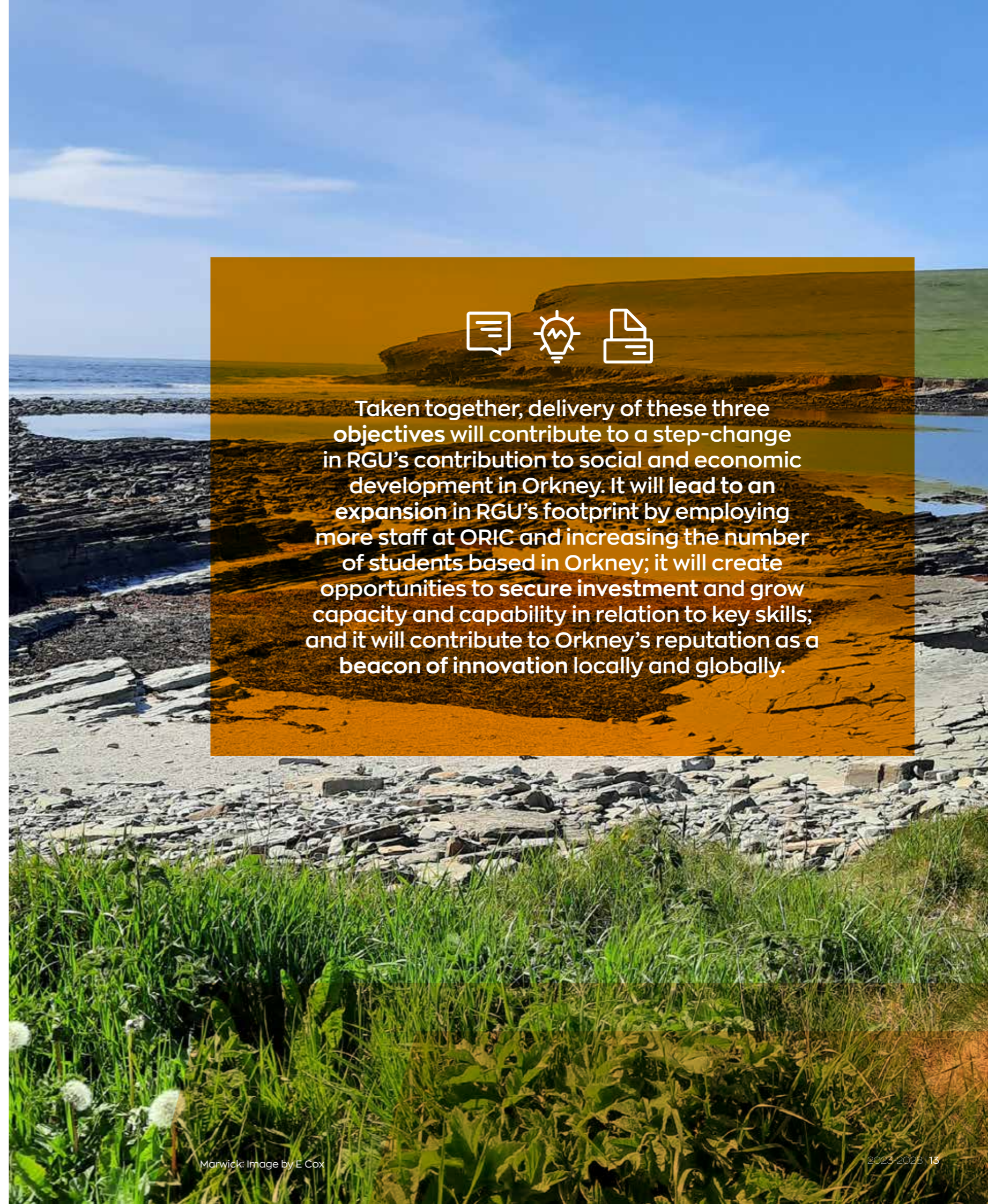


Figure 3. Connecting RGU Orkney to broader geographies



Taken together, delivery of these three objectives will contribute to a step-change in RGU's contribution to social and economic development in Orkney. It will lead to an expansion in RGU's footprint by employing more staff at ORIC and increasing the number of students based in Orkney; it will create opportunities to secure investment and grow capacity and capability in relation to key skills; and it will contribute to Orkney's reputation as a beacon of innovation locally and globally.

Enhancing the management and governance of RGU Orkney

Overall institutional responsibility for RGU Orkney sits with the Vice Principal for Research and Community Engagement (VPRCE) who reports to the University Executive and who works closely with and is supported by the Orkney Development Manager and the Academic Lead for RGU Orkney and the North.

In addition, an RGU Orkney Steering Group, (Figure 4) chaired by the VPRCE and comprising the Development Manager, Academic Lead, representatives of each of the Schools and the National Subsea Centre, meets 3 or 4 times a year and it both reviews engagement across the University with existing projects in Orkney and identifies **future opportunities for collaborative projects** between academic staff and local stakeholders.

While these arrangements work well, there is an opportunity to build on and develop them going forward. It is proposed that there are regular opportunities for key local stakeholders to feed into the **evolution of RGU Orkney 2023-2028**, commenting on its implementation and alignment with local priorities, and act as critical friends, through an RGU Orkney Advisory Board.

RGU Orkney Steering Group

- ✔ Chaired by Vice Principal Research and Community Engagement
- ✔ 1 member from each RGU School, typically those engaged in ongoing projects/ activities in Orkney.
- ✔ Member from National Subsea Centre
- ✔ Development Manager, RGU Orkney
- ✔ Academic Lead RGU Orkney and the North
- ✔ Head of Research Strategy, Culture and Performance
- ✔ Head of Entrepreneurship and Innovation Group
- ✔ Senior Business Development Manager

Fig 4 RGU Orkney Steering Group



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Stromness Golf Course: Image by E Cox

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