



**EQUALITY OUTCOMES 2017 – 2021  
PROGRESS REPORT**

**April 2021**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In April 2017 the University published a set of five equality outcomes as follows:

1. Our University: actively embrace equality and diversity through the student and staff experience;
2. Breaking down barriers: increase access for learners traditionally facing greater barriers to higher education;
3. Supporting student success: support learners through each step of their educational pathways;
4. Enriching the student experience: unleashing individual potential through a complete RGU experience.
5. Achieving graduate employability: shape creative, professional and engaged individuals;

This report provides an overview of actions and activities the University has undertaken to achieve each of the five equality outcomes and the progress made in achieving these.

## 2. EQUALITY OUTCOMES 2017 – 2021 PROGRESS

### **2.1 Our University: Actively Embracing Equality and Diversity**

The University has a strong commitment to the active promotion of equality and diversity across all of its activities, with a culture which values and celebrates authenticity, approachability, collaboration, innovation, ambition and respectfulness. Significant progress has been made to further embed this approach in the past two years to embrace equality and diversity across the range of the University's activities for both staff and students. While this outcome does relate to actively embracing equality and diversity for both staff and students, this section of the report focusses on activity relating to staff as other elements of this work relating to students are captured through the other four equality outcomes.

The lived experience of staff is now better represented in more active involvement in the decision-making structures of the University through a re-structure of the equality and diversity forum. The University now has an increased number of staff networks, which are more representative of the demography of the University, with three active networks for Race Equality, Women's Network and the Rainbow Network. Although the staff survey does not have a specific equality focus, the survey was undertaken during the pandemic with a significant emphasis on staff engagement, wellbeing and supporting flexible working. The results of the survey demonstrated the highest ever level of staff commitment at 95%, with 90% of respondents agreeing that line managers provide a role model in respect of the RGU values, as noted above. In addition, the University's Gender Pay Gap report, published alongside this report, highlights a significant improvement in the overall pay gap as a result of targeted institutional actions. The strategic leadership of Equality and Diversity has also been revised with this responsibility now assigned to a specific member of the Executive, the Vice-Principal for Corporate Operations, to provide clear and accountable leadership in this area.

While significant progress has been made to actively embrace equality and diversity in regards to staff, this is an ongoing area of work and as such will form an important element of the University's equality outcomes for 2021 – 2025 which will include specific outcomes relating to an inclusive

working environment, more purposeful staff engagement across equality strands and an increase in applications for senior positions that better reflect the demographics of the University. These outcomes have been considered in light of staff equality data, published as part of the University's 2021 Mainstreaming Report.

To progress this equality outcome the University has undertaken the following activities in the past two years:

- i. Leadership of Equality & Diversity: The University has assigned lead responsibility for equality and diversity to the Vice-Principal of Corporate Operations, who subsequently chairs both the Equality and Diversity Sub-Committee and the Equality and Diversity Forum. These groups were formed as part of a review of the University's equality committees to ensure that they were aligned with the decision making structures of the University. The two groups have different purposes, the committee to ensure that equality mainstreaming is undertaken across the range of the University's management functions, and the forum to understand the lived experience of staff and students in the community. While the two groups have different purposes it is important to note that they are considered equal.
- ii. Race Equality Network: The staff Race Equality Network was re-launched in 2020 with support from HR. As with the other two existing staff equality networks, members of the race equality network are invited to actively participate in the University's Equality & Diversity Forum to ensure that the network is represented, has an opportunity to share the lived experience of staff and has involvement in the decision making structure of the University.
- iii. Online signal for help: It has been widely reported that during the covid-19 pandemic and consequential lockdown restrictions that instances of gender-based violence have increased. In response to this the University has developed guidance on ways in which staff can make a "signal for help" disclosure, a discreet non-verbal method to indicate they need help. This guidance provides staff with a resource in understanding how best to support individuals who make this disclosure and the steps they can take in a way that ensures that individuals safety.
- iv. Equality Champion role change: For a number of years the University has had staff equality champions across a range of protected characteristics. In 2020 it was recognised that the role was not being utilised to its full potential and that equality champions required greater institutional support to engage in institutional change. As a result the role of equality champions has been reviewed to allow for volunteers from any staff members to take on the role, where previously this was limited to senior staff, for a dedicated member of the HR team to support each equality strand and equality champion and for these roles to be appointed for a period of three years. Staff equality champions continue to be involved in the University's Equality & Diversity Forum and other activities.
- v. Promotion of equality in recruitment processes: Unconscious bias training has been embedded in training provided to staff involved in recruitment activities. Recruitment specialists based in the HR department provide training on unconscious bias during recruitment and how to mitigate the effects of it to ensure a fair and equal recruitment process.
- vi. Equality & Diversity staff training: A series of enhancements have been made to the staff equality and diversity training, including accessibility improvements, an introduction from the Principal & Vice-Chancellor which state's the University's commitment to diversity and inclusion

and sets the tone for the rest of the induction process. A further update to the equality and diversity training is planned for 2021.

- vii. Menopause Policy: The University has developed two sets of guidance to support the wellbeing of staff who are or will be experiencing the menopause. The first set of guidance is for individual staff members, signposting support and resources to them. The second is guidance specifically for managers to on how to support an employee who is or will be experiencing symptoms of menopause. The aim of this guidance is to raise awareness and foster an environment of open, respectful and honest dialogue that ensures employees are comfortable having these discussions and so that managers know what support can be offered.
- viii. Participation in Pride: The University participated in Pride celebrations in both 2019 and 2020, although in different ways as a result of the pandemic. In 2019, the University had a float at Grampian Pride, organised by the LGBT+ staff network and staff and students across the university, showing support for the LGBT+ community in the North East of Scotland. In addition, the roll-out of rainbow lanyards, a campaign led by the staff Rainbow Network, has continued to visibly signal that RGU is an inclusive and welcoming place for our LGBT staff and students.
- ix. Supported women's career development: The University has continued to actively participate in the Advance HE 'Aurora' programme, designed specifically for advancing the careers of women working in higher education and has supported a number of staff through this. Over the past four years the University has supported 39 women from both academic and professional services to complete the programme, including through the online version of the programme.
- x. Activities of the staff women's network: The University has continued to support the network in annual celebrations of International Women's day, which this year saw events including an event with Baroness Tanni-Grey Thompson addressing how to achieve an equal future in a covid-19 world. Additional events included webinars on young women's mental health. Additionally the University has now joined the Women in Higher Education Network in February 2021.
- xi. Review of equality & diversity policy and impact assessments: This year has seen a review of both the University's equality & diversity policy and its impact assessment procedure to ensure that both are in line with best practice. The University's Dignity at Work & Study policy is currently under active review to ensure that it contains best practice relating to both gender-based violence and eliminating racial harassment.

## **2.2 BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS**

The University has a long tradition of widening access to higher education with an approach firmly rooted in delivering credible, high-quality interventions which work by inspiring, supporting and enabling people and their families to be confident, and to engage in higher education. Our commitment to widening access has seen an increasing proportion over the past five years of undergraduate students who declare a disability (19.1% in 2020/21), who come from BAME communities (18.4% in 2020/21) and who are over the age of 26 (21.1% in 2020/21). Additionally, over the past five years the University has seen year on year an increasing proportion of students who identify themselves as LGBT+. A significant portion of the University's activity has been in association with efforts to widen access to individuals from the poorest socio-economic backgrounds, for

articulating students, for care-experience and for estranged students, however for the purposes of this report, the focus will be on activity to widen access in relation to the protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010. This year will see the University complete an internal review of widening access definitions with the aim to provide support across a greater range of characteristics, more in line with the provision that the University has for those groups listed above.

The University is proud of its progress in widening access to individuals with protected characteristics but recognises that this remains an ongoing issue, particularly in relation to addressing racism in our society and to break down gender stereotypes and imbalances. In recognition of the ongoing participation gap between male and female undergraduates, the University has developed a specific equality outcome for 2021 – 2025 to address this.

To achieve the significant progress made to break down barriers, the University has undertaken the following key activities in the past two years:

- i. Responding to EHRC Racial Harassment inquiry: The University has proactively responded to the findings of the EHRC inquiry on racial harassment in universities. This work stems from the commitment to stand united against racism with all other universities and colleges in Scotland. In response to these findings the University initiated safe space discussions with BIPOC students and staff to share lived experiences to instigate discussions on what measures can be put in place as a first step. A culture shift day was held with senior leaders to understand thoughts behind what needs to be changed in line with best practice and the University will implement the Advance HE/SFC 'Tackling Racism on Campus' Toolkit, released in March 2021. Additionally, hate crime reporting was added to the University's established 'Report and Support' platform, used initially for disclosures of gender-based violence but now extended. The University's approach recognises the need for allyship and bystander intervention training in that racism must be solved by a whole community approach.
- ii. LGBT Youth Chartermark Award: Significant activity has been undertaken to support our LGBT+ students, which has resulted in the University having achieved the LGBT+ Youth Chartermark in recognition of this. Feedback received from LGBT Youth Scotland noted the University's positive social media content and detailed and realistic impact assessments.
- iii. British Sign Language action plan: The University approved a BSL action plan with a total of 30 actions to improve accessibility for BSL users in public life in Scotland. A full report on progress was provided to Deaf Action in August 2020 but key issues include ongoing support from applications stage through to enrolment for BSL users, all video material on our website is now required to be subtitled, a pilot scheme to deliver BSL awareness training for students has commenced and progress in providing audio-visual materials for teaching purposes is continuing in compliance with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (no.2) Accessibility Regulations 2018. The University will continue activity to implement the BSL plan.
- iv. Challenging gender bias: The University has implemented a proactive, centrally controlled approach to challenging gender and other bias through positive use of imagery, language and testimonials across the full range of printed and digital media, publications, campaigns and open days.
- v. Addressing gender imbalances: A sustained commitment to reducing severe gender imbalance at the University has resulted in a reduction in the gender imbalance in Gray's School of Art,

the School of Nursing, Midwifery & Paramedic Practice, the School of Applied Social Science, the School of Computing and the School of Engineering all seeing the highest proportion of enrolments from the under-represented gender in the most recently available data.

- vi. Women in STEM network: The University has supported the launch of a student Women in STEM network, which aims to reach out to high schools and promote STEM choices to female pupils, providing by the School of Engineering and the School of Computing.

### **2.3 SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS**

Providing appropriate support for students to succeed in their studies and to grow as individuals is a cornerstone of the University's strategy, with an aim to sustain a culture that promotes and supports positive wellbeing to enable students to thrive and graduate with a positive outcome. This builds on a strategic commitment to deliver a student-centred, high-quality experience.

The University has taken a series of positive steps over the past four years to enhance student support to enable success. This is reflected in a longstanding record of retention consistently above the Scottish average, although it is of note that for the most recently available data (2019/20) that overall retention declined slightly. For the purposes of monitoring retention by protected characteristic, the University uses a measure from its Outcome Agreement with the SFC which provides data on the proportion of full-time, first year Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants. Under this measure, the University is proud that over the past three years, the retention rate for BME and disabled Scottish domiciled undergraduate entrants has consistently been above the University average and target relating to this measure. Similarly the University has consistently had a very high retention rate for female undergraduates. It is of note that in 2019/20 that the gap in retention for male and female undergraduates stands at just 0.1%.

In addition to retention, student achievement is also an important part of student success. The University measures this through Good Honours, which accounts for students achieving a classification of a 1st or an upper 2nd. When this outcome was developed in 2017, one of the findings was that some protected characteristic groups including BME, disabled and male students did not perform as well as other groups of students. Data examined through the University's annual student equality monitoring exercise has found that this is a continuing inequality and as a result this will form a specific equality outcome for 2021 – 2025, for students with a declared disability, for students aged over 21, for Black and Asian students and for male students.

Key actions taken over the past two years to achieve this outcome include the below. It is of note that a significant proportion of work relating to this outcome relates to enhancements made to the University's offer of mental health and wellbeing support, work made more urgent by the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic:

- i. Shift to online provision: In recognition of the potential for increased anxieties and challenges around the transition to higher education in 2020/21, the Student Welcome was redesigned and restructured to provide a safe welcome experience, minimise anxiety and to establish a strong connection with our students. All of the University's support services were transferred to online provision during the pandemic including study skills, counselling, disability, support and careers services.
- ii. Counselling capacity: The University's counselling service has increased its capacity to support students with an increase of available hours and additional staff. This service has crucially

continued to be available throughout the covid-19 pandemic with remote support available with more flexible patterns of provision to meet student needs.

- iii. School wellbeing check-ins: With the increased pressures on mental health and wellbeing brought by the covid pandemic, the University implemented a wellbeing check-in service intended to support students within Schools who may be particularly vulnerable during the period of lockdown. This provides an additional touchpoint for students, as an additional support for students who are self-isolating, making sure they are aware of support services, and checking in with them during a vulnerable period.
- iv. Mental Health First Aid: Prior to the pandemic the University ran a programme of Mental Health First Aid training for a large number of academic staff to enable them to act as Mental Health First Aiders.
- v. More effective use of equality and diversity data: In order to better understand the student journey and where interventions are needed the University has continually enhanced and improved the way in which it monitors and analyses student equality data. These data are broken down by protected characteristics, with intersectional analysis, relating to the student population, retention, achievement and employability. The results of this annual exercise are provided to the University's Institutional Appraisal Group to enable early identification of issues to be addressed through school quality improvement plans. Improvements in the way that this data is analysed and understood have allowed for a clear series of trends to emerge on where students are facing inequalities, which have then formed the basis of the 2021 – 2025 equality outcomes.

## **2.4 ENRICHING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

A high-quality student experience is vital to the University's mission to transform people and communities. A continued focus on adopted a student-centred approach to deliver an inclusive and welcoming learning environment is reflected in the University's achievement of second university in Scotland and in the UK (excluding small, specialist and private providers) for overall student satisfaction in the National Student Survey (NSS). Across almost all available characteristics provided by the NSS, the University has seen a sustained improvement in the overall satisfaction score. This is the case for respondents who are mature (21+), male and female, white, black and those who have a specific learning disability. This is a very positive accomplishment, achieved through a range of activities further detailed below. In addition to the NSS, the University also undertakes an internal student experience questionnaire (SEQ) for students across all years.

A continued commitment to ensuring a high-quality student experience was a key focus for the University in light of challenges brought by the covid-19 pandemic with an approach to deliver a safe and supportive learning environment. Close engagement and early planning with the Students Union enabled a successful transition to online and blended provision, and the success of this approach is evidenced in the University's internal student experience questionnaire from semester one of 2020/21 which reflects positive feedback from students.

Building on this success, the University remains focussed on a student-centred approach and will take action in 2021 – 2025 to address inequalities for those groups of students who have consistently had an overall satisfaction rate below that of the University average, including those with a disability excluding a specific learning disability and for Asian respondents. This will form a targeted equality

outcome in 2021 – 2025. Additionally, in recognition of the negative impacts of the pandemic on the student experience, this is being closely monitored through the University's high-level risk register to ensure that any issues are addressed, monitored and improved upon.

Key activities that have been undertaken the last two years to achieve this equality outcome include:

- i. Student equality champions: Student Equality Champions, elected through RGU:Union continue to be involved in the University's equality committees through the University's Student Partnership Agreement. Equality champions are elected to represent mature students, disability and inclusion, race, women, mental health, trans and sexual orientation strands and are invited to participate as equal partners in the University's equality & diversity forum. The student voice is also represented in the University's equality and diversity sub-committee with nominees from the forum in attendance alongside the President of Education & Welfare and the Vice-President of Welfare;
- ii. Report & Support: The University remains committed to a zero-tolerance approach to sexual violence and harassment and to providing a working and learning environment where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Our Report & Support platform for reporting instances of gender-based violence has continued to be available, and updated with additional support during covid-19, and remote support implemented during the period of lockdown. The University has increased its First Responder capacity from 19 to 34 staff members with specialised training from Rape Crisis Scotland. Staff who are first responders are supported through a first responder network, as a fora to share information, best practice and provide peer support.
- iii. Safety on campus: Building on the work of the report & support online system, the University has run a series of campaigns and training sessions to highlight positive relationship behaviours. This includes a Healthy Relationships campaign, consent training, bystander intervention and encouraging positive citizenship. This activity has extended to tackling behaviours associated with sports initiations, including a session from the #EmilyTest campaign. 33 RGU sports clubs endorsed a campaign on #fulltimeoninitiations, raising awareness of the unacceptable behaviours of initiation traditions and the dangers associated with them. This campaign was used as an area of best practice across the Scottish Student Sport Network.
- iv. Black History Month at RGU: In October 2020 the University worked in partnership with RGU:Union to not only celebrate stories of black origins, history and culture but to raise awareness about racism and actively join in tackling and eradicating racism completely. The University worked in partnership with the Union to develop activities under the theme of 'Knowledge is our Power'. Part of this activity was the inclusion of hate crime reporting in to the University's report & support platform to ensure that the University actively deals with hate crime, racism, micro-aggressions, bullying and harassment. Further to this, RGU:Union has launched a Black Liberation Network, as a safe space for BIPOC individuals to engage in activism and find community support.
- v. Online Mental Health Provision: The University has invested in online resources, such as Silvercloud, which offers free and anonymous cognitive behavioural therapy across a range of areas such as depression, anxiety, stress and body image. The take up of this service has

increased over the period of the pandemic, having been regularly promoted to support our community.

- vi. Support for student parents: The University has created a dedicated page for student parents, signposting them to key resources and support such as financial assistance during their time at university. This is further to activities to support the use of our facilities for breastfeeding, in making our campus welcoming and inclusive.

## **2.5 EQUALITY OUTCOME: ACHIEVING GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY**

The University has graduate employability at the heart of its approach to education and works closely with industry to ensure that all of our graduates have the knowledge and experience to allow them to succeed and thrive in life-long careers. At an institutional level, the University is proud of its overall record of graduate employability having maintained its position as top in Scotland for graduate employability in the Graduate Outcomes survey for graduates from 2017/18. This demonstrates an outstanding record for graduate employability both in absolute terms and overall sector performance.

The University measures performance in employability across a number of surveys including the Graduate Outcomes survey, an internal Leavers Survey and for historical purposes the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. When this equality outcome was developed, it was based on data relating to the DLHE survey which has since ceased and there has since been significant changes in the way in which graduate employability data is collected nationally. Progress in relation to this outcome is therefore measured from two different sources, the University's internal Leavers' Survey which is modelled on DLHE and the first published Graduate Outcomes data, which relates to the 2017/18 graduating cohort.

When this equality outcome was developed, the University found that respondents to DLHE with a declared disability and BME respondents had a lower employability rate than those with no declared disability and white respondents. Positive progress has been made in supporting graduate employability for black graduates, with both the internal Leavers Survey (2017/18 and 2018/19) and the Graduate Outcomes survey (2017/18) demonstrating that 100% of black respondents were in employment and/or further study and that this group of students had a professional employability level above the University target (80%). For Asian graduates, there has been a sustained increase in the level of respondents who are employed or in further study, however this remains lower than the University average and target. For graduates with a declared disability the employment/further study rate has increased and in the Graduate Outcomes survey 96.8% of respondents with a declared disability were employed and/or in further study.

The University remains committed to maintaining and enhancing its graduate employability and this will continue to be monitored, with an equality analysis through the University's annual institutional appraisal process. In addition, given the impacts of the covid-19 pandemic on employment, and particularly on graduate prospects, the University has a specific risk on its high-level risk register to closely monitor and implement interventions where possible to ensure that all RGU graduates are able to succeed.

Key activities that have been undertaken in the past two years to achieve this outcome include the following:

- i. Annual course appraisal: Significant enhancements have been made to the University's course appraisal process in recent years. This includes the provision of a wide range of data made available to course leaders through the University's business intelligence tool, RGU Insight. This data includes detailed information on employability at a School and Course level with a breakdown of results available by age, sex, disability and ethnicity to allow course leaders and schools to identify any inequalities at a more local level and develop mitigating actions where required.
- ii. RGU E-Hub: The University's central resource for support and assistance for career research, planning and development, E-Hub, has seen significant improvement in recent years. This resource, available to all students, provides a wide range of information and support on career development but also has a number of dedicated resources specifically dedicated to equality and diversity. This includes a suite of modules dedicated to equality and diversity, as well as resources on ways to identify inclusive employers, developing intercultural skills, understanding unconscious bias, career support and career advancement tactics for those with protected characteristics.
- iii. Employability Events: The University has continued to hold its annual What's Next Conference, a career development event providing practical advice and skills to enhance employability through a series of workshops, games, presentations and interactive content. The event was provided entirely online in March 2021 with key themes around careers, innovation and entrepreneurship, employers and further study.
- iv. Support for graduates: All graduates are now provided an offer of continued careers support for a period of six months after graduation as they navigate a challenging economic landscape, post-pandemic. The University has also developed an offer of mentoring for graduates from alumni to provide additional support.

### **3. SUMMARY AND FUTURE OUTCOMES**

The University's equality outcomes between 2017-2021 can be considered as strategic aims that the University has made significant progress towards achieving. The University remains committed to being an inclusive and welcoming institution for both students and staff and has made positive improvements in the last four years to achieving this. In reflecting on the 2017-2021 equality outcomes, it is of note that these were ambitious aims and that a wide range of activities have been progressed to meet these overarching aims. However, the University recognises that the format of the outcomes does not enable clear measurable progress, and this has formed a key consideration in the development of the 2021-2025 outcomes. The outcomes for 2021-2025 have been developed to provide SMART outcomes with clear actions and measurable metrics.

As a result the University has developed seven equality outcomes for 2021 – 2025 which will take in to account the significant work already undertaken to achieve the 2017 – 2021 outcomes, and building on that success to implement equality and diversity across the functions of the university with a more focussed approach highlighting specific inequalities that have been identified:

- i. Improved retention rates for those more likely to withdraw;
- ii. Increased achievement of Good Honours for students with characteristics with achievement below that of the University average;

- iii. Increase in the overall satisfaction of students with characteristics who have a satisfaction rate below that of the University average;
- iv. Increase the proportion of male students who take up a place at the University;
- v. Greater flexibility for staff, creating opportunity and maintaining an inclusive working environment;
- vi. Increased and more purposeful engagement with staff across all equality strands;
- vii. The number of applications from candidates for senior positions reflect the demographics of the University.

The progress of these equality outcomes will be monitored and measured on an ongoing basis by the University's Equality & Diversity Sub-Committee with a review in 2023 to measure progress at the mid-way point.