

**UNIVERSITY BUSINESS PLAN  
2022/23**

## Introduction

As the University emerges from the pandemic and given the on-going development of key sub-strategies following the approval of the University's newly refreshed strategy, this business plan covers the 2022/23 academic session. The business plan aligns with the University's high-level risk register and financial forecast.

During the course of the last academic session, the University concluded the process of developing its new strategy. This business plan is therefore the first to be written within the slightly revised structure of the new strategy and its new key performance indicators. In developing this business plan, the University is building upon a strong bedrock of success. During the course of the 2021/22 this success was reflected in:

- a strong performance in the National Student Survey 2022 which ranked RGU among the top three universities in Scotland for overall student experience and top 10 in the UK (excluding colleges and small, specialist, and private providers);
- our leading reputation for graduate employability after being placed the top University in Scotland and third in the UK for the employability of our graduates;
- very positive results in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey which ranked RGU first in the categories for research culture and research skills;
- the expansion of the University's short course portfolio and the delivery of initiatives focused on skills and workforce development
- the continued growth in the University's international student enrolments – with the University recording its largest ever number of applications from overseas; and
- the continued financial results of the University recording a second successive underlying surplus in as many academic sessions.

This business plan consists of the key activities that will enable the University to implement its new strategy. The actions (and targets) contained within it are reflected in local Academic School and Professional Support Department plans as appropriate. In order to provide more detail on various aspects of the University's strategy a series of sub-strategies covering key areas of the strategy will be finalised during the 2022/23 academic session and brought to the Board for approval. These sub-strategies will include a number of investment requests which the Board will consider ahead of the development of the next business plan. Achieving many of the ambitious 6 year and 20 year targets captured within the 2022/23 plan will be dependent on securing requested investment.

## Significant external challenges

In developing this business plan the Executive has undertaken a review of the current external challenges that it faces in implementing its strategy. These challenges have helped shape the business plan actions and will be considered as the University seeks to make strategic investment over the course of this academic session. These challenges are captured in the high-level risk register and summarised in **Annex A**:

- Funded places: the University is exposed to clawback from a failure to recruit to its funded places
- Public funding environment: the University's financial security is damaged either by cuts to grants or changes to the funding formulae
- Tuition fee revenues: the University's revenues levels are unsustainable due to over-reliance on a single market
- Uncertain political environment: the University's autonomy is impaired due to political instability within both UK and Scottish Governments
- Cybersecurity: the University experiences a major cyber security attack
- Cost of living crisis: the University is adversely affected by the effects of poor UK economic performance
- Student experience: the University's performance in key metrics is adversely affected by significant new national policy initiatives
- Energy transition: the University is unable to address the changing needs of the energy sector, its workforce or the wider region during the transition

## Strategic aim 1: Teaching, learning & the student experience

Over the course of the last three academic sessions there has been significant disruption to teaching and the student experience through the pandemic and the campus is now returning to a "normal" pattern of attendance. The disruption caused by pandemic has had (and continues to have) a significant effect on key student experience metrics. Student retention, satisfaction and employability have been negatively affected across the sector and these patterns are reflected in the University's decrease in absolute performance, albeit the University has broadly maintained its relative performance in the sector. Similarly, the pandemic has affected schools and colleges and coupled with the suspension of examinations, the effect of Brexit and additional funded places in the system have increased the competitive pressure on universities to achieve its funded places. Conversely, the same pressures have led to a more buoyant recruitment environment for international students.

As a response to these pressures and to reverse the decline in student experience metrics witnessed, the University, in the last academic year has undertaken a Future of Teaching and Learning project that consists of a series of workstream packages exploring the relevance of the current portfolio, the shape and size of the future portfolio and the co creation of standards that provide a framework for all teaching, learning and assessment at RGU. Outcomes of these reviews will be captured in the University's Teaching, Learning & Student Experience sub-strategy which will be finalised during the course of this academic year.

Over the course of the 2022/23 academic session, the University will prioritise activities to deliver the following outcomes:

1. **Student recruitment:** recruitment to the University's existing course portfolio is optimised in a manner which minimises the University's exposure to potential clawback of public funding and maximises tuition fee revenues
2. **Portfolio development:** a future focussed portfolio is agreed with new courses being developed and commencing over the next three years
3. **Student learning experience:** the standards for teaching & learning; assessment & feedback are effectively implemented; and a process for attendance & engagement monitoring is designed and tested
4. **Curriculum development:** the principles of RGU+ are progressively embedded into all curricula
5. **Student support:** students are supported to optimise personal and academic achievement

The key performance indicator targets associated with this area of the business plan are:

Key Performance Indicator	2021/22 Target	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Target	6 year Target	20 year Target
KPI 1: Student success rate	92%	92.1%	<b>91%</b>	93%	95%
KPI 2: Student satisfaction rate	90%	82.83%	<b>84%</b>	90%	95%
KPI 3: Student employability rate	97%	96.1%	<b>96.5%</b>	97%	98%
KPI 4: Student access rate	10%	6.1%	<b>6.5%</b>	8%	10%
KPI 5: Tuition fee revenues	£38.4m	£47.5M	<b>£49.1M</b>	£58M	£75M

KPI 6: % over/under the University's consolidation student number	-2%	-8%	<b>-2%</b>	6%	6%
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## Strategic aim 2: Research & knowledge exchange

In the Research Excellence Framework 2021, almost 70% of the University's research outputs were rated as internationally excellent or world leading. The REF results show that the University needs to prioritise strengthening its performance in the impact and environment components. Prior to the results, the University had undertaken an extensive and inclusive exercise to develop a new research strategy. The overarching aim of which is to create a sustainable, inclusive and interdisciplinary research environment. This will be achieved by bringing together a community of academic and professional services staff and doctoral students to work in partnership with external organisations, to address a range of local and global challenges where we have the expertise to make a difference. These themes are:

- Environment, Energy and Sustainability: focused on addressing many of the global challenges set out in the UN Sustainability Goals, this theme brings together researchers who approach these issues from a breadth of disciplinary perspectives that include the life sciences, engineering and computing but also embraces the social sciences and business disciplines.
- Health and Well-being: this theme captures our research which both promotes and protects human health and wellbeing in communities. It covers a breadth of research from long term conditions to new drug discovery and a wide range of disciplines spanning health, social and life sciences and pharmacy.
- Living in a Digital World: our research in this theme covers a broad range of computational research from Artificial Intelligence to interactive machine learning and cybersecurity and explores the impacts and implications of the digital for different domains including health, net zero, cities and creative practice.
- Inclusive and Creative Societies: our research in this theme embraces a broad range of topic areas relating to social justice and creative practice, drawing together researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds including art and design, architecture, social sciences, law, and humanities.

Initially implementation of the new strategy will focus around develop existing opportunities to increase research activity. This has, and will continue to, focus on creating an inclusive research community activity and to which many of the planned

activities over the course of this academic year will contribute towards. During the course of this academic year the University will finalise plans to make significant investment within research capacity. Any such investment will be focused around the four interdisciplinary (and over-lapping) research themes outlined above.

Over the course of the 2022/23 academic session, the University will prioritise activities to deliver the following outcomes:

6. **Research portfolio:** research activity that contributes to the University's four interdisciplinary research themes grows in volume
7. **Research intensity and inclusivity:** the proportion of academic staff who are research active is increased
8. **Research productivity:** all research active staff have a minimum workload allocation for research of 20% and an agreed research plan for this allocation
9. **Research quality:** all academic staff undertaking research are producing outputs of at least 3\* quality
10. **Research environment:** there is effective support for PhD studentships and mentoring of early career researchers by more experienced staff
11. **Research impact:** there is early identification of research with the potential to achieve significant impact

The key performance indicator targets associated with this area of the business plan are:

Key Performance Indicator	2021/22 Target	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Target	6 year Target	20 year Target
KPI 7: Research revenues	£5.2m	£3.52M	<b>£5.3M</b>	£8M	£20M
KPI 8: Research outputs*	360	363	<b>380</b>	500	tbc
KPI 9: Number of knowledge exchange awards		tbc	<b>40</b>	75	100

\* the figures provided for this KPI are for the calendar 2021 and 2022.

### Strategic aim 3: Economic, social & cultural development

Over the course of the last year the University has continued to focus its efforts around regional economic development. This led to the securing of £1.7M of investment through the Scottish Government North East Economic Recovery and Skills Fund which enabled delivery of a range of initiatives relating to energy transition, health and social

care, and entrepreneurship as well as significantly enhancing the University's upskilling portfolio. The University has continued to support the development of enterprise and entrepreneurship within the region through the use of government funded programmes such as innovation vouchers and KTPs and through the roll-out of a range of entrepreneurship related activities. Critical for the University's efforts within this strand of its strategy is working in partnership.

Community engagement is a key component of the University's strategic commitment to contribute to the prosperity of the region by delivering initiatives and projects focused on promoting sustainable social and cultural development. The University continues to widen access to creative education and careers for young people by engaging with school pupils across the North East through the Mobile Art School, the University's custom-built van equipped with state-of-the-art creative tools and materials, delivering workshops across a range of art and design subject areas. Inspiring young people through community engagement has also been a key driver of the University's Streetsport initiative, run in partnership with Denis Law Legacy Trust, which has continued to deliver free sport and creative activity sessions throughout Aberdeen to reduce instances of youth crime and anti-social behaviour while helping develop the employability and aspirations of youngsters.

As travel restrictions have been lifted following the pandemic the University's international activities are increasing. The last year has seen the securing of a significant contract with the Government of Guyana for various distance learning courses in support of energy developments and the restarting of the Nippon Foundation and Kobe City Government summer schools. The University will continue to explore potential partners to extend and grow its range of transnational educational provision and other international activities.

Over the course of this academic year, the University will develop a sub-strategy relating to this aim which will enable a more coherent approach between the various strands of economic, social and cultural development to be articulated.

Over the course of the 2022/23 academic session, the University will prioritise activities to deliver the following outcomes:

12. **Upskilling:** grow and develop a sustainable and industry-informed portfolio of upskilling and reskilling courses to support economic development
13. **Enterprise:** foster an enterprise culture and maximise opportunities for entrepreneurship and innovative thinking within the University community
14. **Economic transformation:** contribute significantly to economic transformation

within the region and wider Scotland by playing to strengths and partnering with ambitious organisations

15. **Global ambition:** develop strategic international collaborations to generate significant value for RGU and its partners

The key performance indicator targets associated with this area of the business plan are:

Key Performance Indicator	2021/22 Target	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Target	6 year Target	20 year Target
KPI 10: Number of start-ups supported*	2	17	<b>18</b>	25	100
KPI 11: Awards from business engagement	£6m	£9.35M	£7M	£20M	£40M

\* the figure provided for this KPI relates specifically to new RGU business start-ups (as defined by HE-BCI). The 2022/23 accelerator will be open to students and graduates of less than five years, but only graduates of less than two years can be included within the HEB-CI return. The 20 year target assumes that all start ups supported by RGU can be included.

### **Enablers: university community; sustainable future; infrastructure; and partnerships**

Over the course of the 2022/23 academic session, the University will prioritise activities to deliver the following outcomes:

16. **Equality, diversity & inclusion:** implement actions to support the achieve the Institutional Equality Outcomes
17. **Physical & digital infrastructure:** develop Estates and Digital sub-strategies to deliver a modern vibrant and secure campus
18. **Environment & sustainability:** minimise our environmental footprint and further embed sustainability, including contributing to the UN Sustainable Development Goals as the University moves towards our Net Zero target
19. **Fundraising:** Develop capacity and maximise fundraising opportunities in support of University strategy & ambition
20. **Alumni engagement:** provide our alumni with greater opportunity to help the University achieve its ambitions

The key performance indicator targets associated with this area of the business plan are:

<b>Key Performance Indicator</b>	2021/22 Target	2021/22 Actual	<b>2022/23 Target</b>	6 year Target	20 year Target
KPI 12: Staff commitment to the University	88%	95%*	<b>95%</b>	95%	95%
KPI 13: Underlying surplus	£-2.0m	£6.2M	<b>-£1.2M</b>	£6M	£10M
KPI 14: Cash generated from operations	£7.6m	£22.8M	<b>£10.4M</b>	£18M	£25M
KPI 15: Carbon footprint		tbc	<b>tbc</b>	70% towards net zero	Net zero achieved

\* this figures is the 2020/21 actual result as the staff commitment question was not asked in 2021/22 as the survey focused on staff wellbeing.

### Monitoring and review of the business plan

Progress against this business plan will be monitored by the Executive on a regularly basis and reported to the Board of Governors in the following ways:

- The Executive will provide quarterly reports on the progress against the actions and where possible, at different points in the year, report on forecast outturn against targets;
- The Executive will review the University's high-level risk register and the progress of the improvement actions contained within that register and provide a report on its review to the Audit Committee; and
- Annually (in September) the Executive presents the Board of Governors with a report of progress against the targets contained within the business plan aligned to the University's key performance indicators.

Recovery from the pandemic and the resultant national and global economic challenges current present, it is likely that the University will continue to experience a period of considerable change and uncertainty. The Executive will advise the Board when circumstances, both external and internal, suggest the necessity to make any changes to this plan.

## Annex A: Summary high-level risk register

<b>Risk Title</b>	<b>Risk</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Gross Risk Score</b>
Funded places	The University is exposed to clawback from a failure to recruit to its funded places	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>25</b>
Public funding environment	The University's financial security is damaged either by cuts to grants or changes to the funding formulae	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>25</b>
Tuition fee revenues	The University's revenues levels are unsustainable due to over-reliance on a single market	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>20</b>
Uncertain political environment	The University's autonomy is impaired due to political instability within both UK and Scottish Governments	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>20</b>
Cybersecurity	The University experiences a major cyber security attack	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>20</b>
Cost of living crisis	The University is adversely affected by the effects of poor UK economic performance	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>20</b>
Student experience	The University's performance in key metrics is adversely affected by significant new national policy initiatives	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>
Energy transition	The University is unable to address the changing needs of the energy sector, its workforce or the wider region in response to energy transition	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>