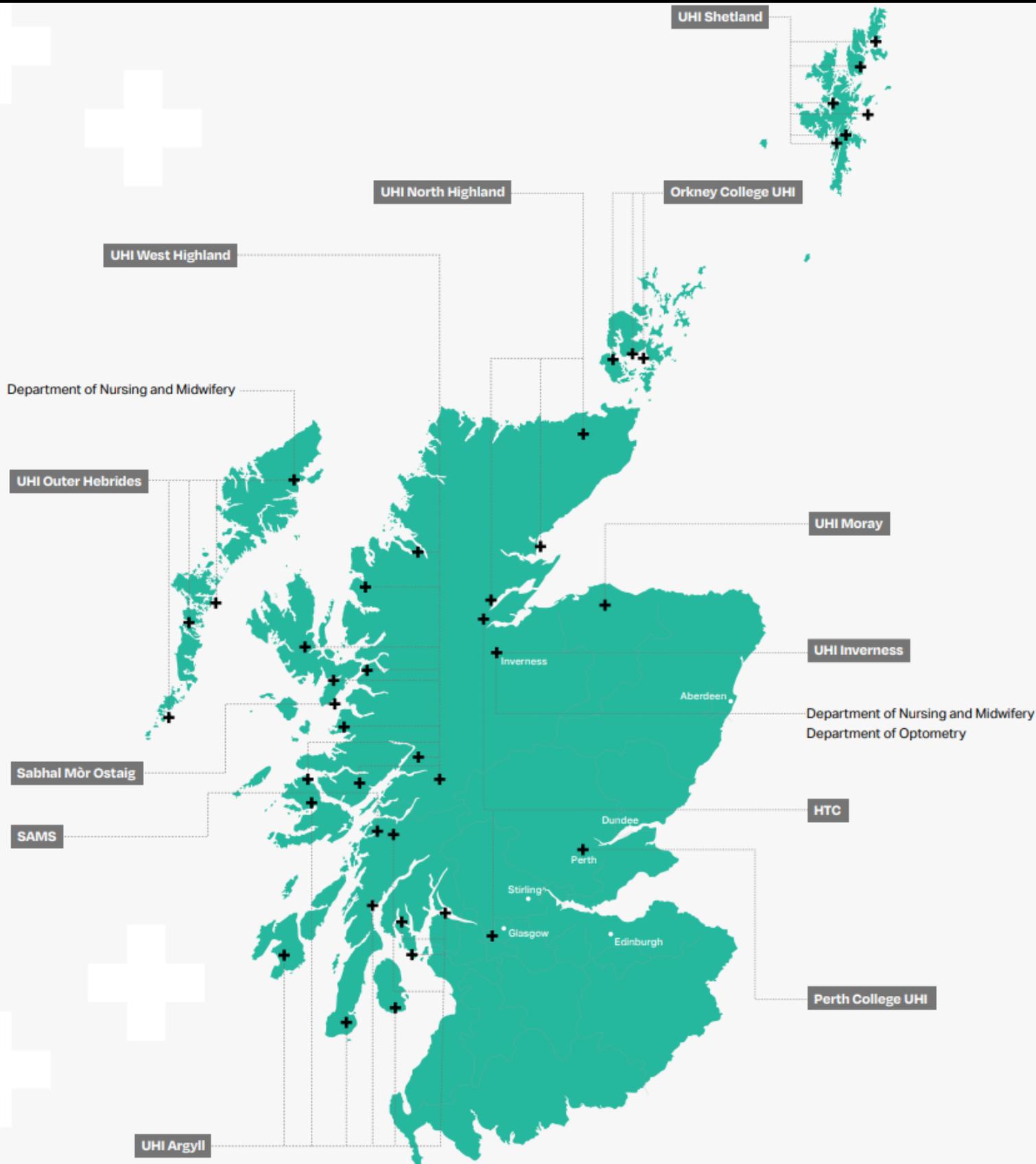


Research, Impact and Knowledge Exchange Strategic Plan 2022-2025

Where learning means more



Vision

The University of the Highlands and Islands is an ambitious and outward facing organisation whose core academic activity impacts at regional, national and international level. All across our region we have centres of excellence and world-class thinking that are pushing the boundaries of academic and applied knowledge, where staff and students are playing a part in changing our region and the world. We produce a wide range of impactful world class research outputs in our chosen research areas, and these reflect the landscapes, seascapes, and the rich tapestry of cultures, and heritage within the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. We will continue to reach out to collaborate with other Universities and organisations at national and international levels in the pursuit of this excellence in research. We will also increase activity in knowledge exchange for the benefit of the communities we serve and the region's economy, ensuring clear linkage of this to our stated research foci.

It follows that we will focus its research and knowledge exchange activities in four main areas:

- + Marine and environmental science
- + Culture, creativity, heritage, language and history
- + Health
- + Landscape, economy, society and education

In the working out of this vision, we recognise and will continue to proactively respond to the current dynamic external context for research, impact and knowledge exchange. In this way we will take full account of a number of significant external drivers: the rise of challenge led research, climate change, the impact of BREXIT; the UK Research and Innovation priorities; the increased importance of research impact and the research environment, the increased focus on equality and diversity; the reality of increased research intensification in some parts of the UK; the UK Industrial strategy; the growing importance of internationalisation in research; and the roll out of the University Innovation Fund.

In relation to Gaelic, we will link this strategic plan for research, impact and knowledge exchange to the research and knowledge exchange section of the University's Gaelic language plan.

Key Performance Indicators

The University will:

- + Increase its research income year on year for the duration of this plan;
- + Increase its knowledge exchange income year on year for the duration of this plan;
- + Secure an overall Grade Point Average for REF 2027 of 3.1 and ensure that the University's fte submission increases by 10% compared with REF 2021;
- + Increase the number of PhD studentships year on year, funded through non-EU sources;
- + Facilitate the development of a culture of scholarship for all staff, including the development of more research-teaching linkages.

We will ensure that that these targets align with the work of the REF steering group, and the RKE operational plan on a year-by-year basis.

We will deliver our vision for research excellence particularly through our research Centres and Institutes and our academic structures. We will embed a culture of scholarship involving all of our staff working across our academic partnership.



Objectives

The delivery of the University's high-level vision is further exemplified through 8 specific objectives:

1. To secure an increased proportion of research output deemed to be internationally excellent and world-leading, industry linked where appropriate;
2. To extend and strengthen both current and emerging areas of research, underpinned by appropriate internal and external research collaboration;
3. To develop an enhanced international profile for the University's research activities, increasingly becoming a partner of choice;
4. To secure enhanced commercialisation of research and knowledge exchange output
5. To diversify research and knowledge exchange income
6. To secure greater cohesion in areas of research and knowledge exchange strength across the Highlands and Islands.
7. To grow the University's graduate school, increasing the number of research students
8. Building on success to date, enhance still further the strength and vitality of our research environment for students and staff.

The undernoted narrative provides a more detailed articulation of how the University will progress these objectives.

1. To secure an increased proportion of research output deemed to be internationally excellent and world-leading, industry linked where appropriate.

This objective is core to our research work as it is a mark of our aspiration regarding the pursuit of excellence in research and associated impacts in society.

It is reflected in a systematic approach to preparations for Research Excellence Framework (2027). Key activities include: the creation of an annual REFPREP plan at institutional level; devolution to the identified leads for each Unit of Assessment (UOA) for ongoing action planning, together with accountability for these; and the establishment of targets for each UOA. Specific audits relating to REF will reveal the extent to which this objective is progressing.

A robust approach to the assessment of individual outputs, and in assessing developing impact case studies, including the utilisation of critical friends will also be key to the achievement of this objective.

2. To extend and strengthen both current and emerging areas of research, underpinned by appropriate internal and external research collaboration.

We have expanded our research output over recent years, in part through expanding and developing our existing areas of research strength. This continues into the REF 2027 cycle, and in addition there are a number of new areas of research focus which are currently emerging. We will support the development of research in performing and visual arts, in education, in theology and in computing as recognised emerging areas of research strength.



3. To develop an enhanced international profile for the University's research activities, increasingly becoming a partner of choice.

Internationalisation is a cross-cutting theme of this strategy as research is by definition international; its focus is frequently on topics which transcend national boundaries. Our work in marine sciences is a good example of this. We will nurture and grow our international research work during the period of this plan.

In particular we will seek ongoing opportunities to extract research findings derived from the highly distinctive landscapes, seascapes, environment, culture, context and heritage of the Highlands and Islands and endeavour to seek opportunities to apply these in international contexts. Examples are our work in researching the provision of remote and rural health services, the interaction which we have with a uniquely dynamic aquaculture industry on the west coast of Scotland, and research carried about by our Institutes of Archaeology, Northern Studies and Agronomy.

4. To secure enhanced commercialisation of research and knowledge exchange output.

We have been involved in a number of ways over recent years in enhancing the impact of our research output, for example, through nearly 50 innovation voucher projects and some 12 Knowledge Transfer Projects (KTPs). The University will use this foundation to build further University/industry collaborations, for the benefit of the University, the region and beyond.

There is considerable further potential to secure enhanced commercialisation of impactful research at the University, whether this is through developing intellectual property rights for specific products/setting up spin-out companies, or whether this on a 'fee for services basis'. In order to strengthen its position, we will intensify the development of our plans for this work, utilising a full range of approaches, from innovation vouchers to Knowledge Transfer Projects (KTPs), spin-out companies and the provision of commercial services.

5. To diversify research and knowledge exchange income.

The environment for research income is currently volatile and is likely to continue to be volatile for the duration of this strategic plan. It will be necessary for challenges relating to income diversification to be embraced, and a robust response to the loss of significant European funds is especially important.

In the period of this strategic plan we will:

1. Establish realistic but ambitious income targets for research and knowledge exchange activity, including grant capture and drive ownership of these throughout the organisation;
2. Seek to draw down funding for research and innovation through continuing to engage with Growth Deals across the region;
3. Engage relentlessly with major UK wide and Scottish research and development initiatives such as the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund;

4. Enhance international research activity, through extending existing international activity in the University's major research areas;
5. Continue to develop a more systematic approach to environment scanning and bid writing in order to realise the opportunities that are available;
6. Take every opportunity to continue to forge strategic relationships with the national bodies at Scottish and UK level, especially the UKRI and individual research councils. This opportunity will be taken in partnership with other regional entities within the Highlands and Islands, especially Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

6. To secure greater cohesion in areas of research and knowledge exchange strength across the Highlands and Islands.

The University's stakeholders across the Highlands and Islands and beyond expect a cohesive and strategic approach to major research and knowledge exchange themes, even when researchers may be working in different areas of the Highlands and Islands, sometimes in relative isolation. It is important therefore that our 'shop window' clearly articulates our strengths to our stakeholders and sponsors. The University's four strategic research areas, broadly covering health, science, arts and humanities, and social sciences, will be reflected in this cohesive approach.

During the period of this strategic plan, we will identify specific disciplines where a more cohesive approach across the University's partnership would be advantageous. This will be achieved through working with the faculties, research clusters and knowledge exchange sector groups to commission a series of discipline level research and knowledge exchange strategies in areas such as: energy, aquaculture; tourism and health

This work will be underpinned by a strengthening of the inter-relationship between our research Centres and Institutes, Faculties and Research Clusters, a significant purpose of which is to secure a fully joined-up narrative around key research areas for the University.



7. To grow the University's graduate school, increasing the number of research students.

The University has seen significant growth in the number of research students that are registered with us over recent years. Whilst these have been funded by a number of sources, especially European funds, it is important that the identification of new sources of research funds, especially from the Research Councils, leads to this continued expansion of our research student numbers. Additionally, we will continue expand the range of research degrees within our portfolio, including MRes programmes, professional doctorates and higher-level doctorates.

In the early part of this strategic plan, the Graduate School will conclude the systematic and secure implementation of the transfer of responsibilities from the University of Aberdeen to the University of the Highlands and Islands, following the award of Research Degree Awarding Powers to the University in 2017.

It is also important, especially given further expansion of research student numbers that the University's Graduate School activities continue to be efficient and effective. We will hence conclude work which has led to the business processes underpinning research students' experience being fully automated, from application to completion.

8. Building on success to date, enhance still further the strength and vitality of our research environment for students and staff.

A strong research environment is a fundamental element of any university and is key to its success. This research and knowledge exchange strategy will continue to be underpinned by a vibrant research culture - defined as the values, expectations, organisational structures, policies and normative practices that facilitate the pursuit of research and scholarship as a collective

commitment by our institution and key to our stated goals. As part of this, it is critical to recognise that active and engaged researchers, both staff and students are fundamental to a strong research environment. As part of the ongoing enhancement of the research environment, equality, diversity and inclusion will be deeply embedded in our work, with a renewed focus on all protected characteristics.

The University's Graduate School will, building on what has already been achieved, enhance further its approach to research training, rolling out strategies to create a vibrant community for all research students, including those working in remote locations. In addition, we will undertake a staff survey in order to identify the specific research needs of our research staff cohort and we will implement a new programme of researcher development opportunities. We will continue with our inter-disciplinary research conferences for staff and research students. We will also ensure the highest level of supervision for all our research students and that our research practices align with current national policy and good practice around open access, equality and inclusion, research integrity, and research ethics. We will continue to strengthen our research and scholarship mentoring scheme and ensure that we use our resources effectively for investment in research infrastructure and equipment.

The University will clearly articulate expectations around scholarly activity to underpin teaching at all levels and implement these in a systematic fashion. Much has already been achieved already in this regard, especially through the University's Learning and Teaching Academy, but there is more potential to link the University's Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy to the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy.

Research, Impact and Knowledge Exchange Strategic Plan

2022-2025



Plan approved by:

UHI Research Knowledge Exchange Committee, 25 August 2022

Research Strategic Lead:

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