

University of the Highlands and Islands

Equality Mainstreaming Report

2017

April 2017

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Summary

This Equality Mainstreaming Report shows our progress in mainstreaming the general duty into our functions and has been developed using where practicable, existing reporting mechanisms. It complements our [Progress report on the mainstreaming of equality and diversity within the University of the Highlands and Islands and our planned equality outcomes 2013 – 2017](#) which detailed our achievement to date in mainstreaming the equality agenda, in terms of the wider university partnership and specifically within the executive office.

As a university we are not traditional – we are different. We are taking a regional approach to developing and reporting on our equalities work by looking across the partnership, taking account of the equalities work of our Academic Partners and bringing it together at a university level. In order to strive for parity of experience for all students and staff, the University has taken a strategic institutional approach to mainstreaming equality and to developing a set of regional equality outcomes.

Our further published reports include:

Progress on equality outcomes 2013-2017:

- A report on final progress in delivering the institution's set of equality outcomes for 2013-2017.

Equality Outcomes 2017-2021:

- A report setting out our new set of equality outcomes, which have been developed using evidence and involvement and that cover all protected characteristics.

Employee Information 2015-2017:

- an annual breakdown of information on the number and relevant protected characteristics of employees, including information on recruitment, development (career progression) and retention.
- details of progress made in gathering and using employment information to better perform the general duty.

Equal pay statement and pay gap analysis 2017:

- as an institution with 150 or more staff: Gender pay gap information and a statement on equal pay, including occupational segregation, for gender, race and disability

Publishing our pan-university reports gives us the opportunity to:

- present the equalities work we are undertaking
- highlight our commitment to equality
- present a set of strategic Regional Equality Outcomes which set out our organisational approach to promoting equality, tackling discrimination and fostering good relations

Our institution

The University of the Highlands and Islands is a collegiate federal partnership of the Executive Office and 13 Academic Partners (APs). Each of the APs is an institution in its own right, with a distinctive focus and mission, which has entered into an academic partnership agreement with the university. The APs include colleges of further and higher education, research institutions and specialist colleges.

Argyll College UHI

Highland Theological College UHI

Inverness College UHI

Lews Castle College UHI

Moray College UHI

NAFC Marine Centre UHI

North Highland College UHI

Orkney College UHI

Perth College UHI

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI

Scottish Association for Marine Science UHI

Shetland College UHI

West Highland College UHI

We are Scotland's newest university, having achieved university title in February 2011, and are the only university based in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Geographically we cover half of the land-mass of Scotland, including areas and communities in which there are no other post-compulsory education providers.

The university partnership provides access to study at further and higher education level, as well as research opportunities, and aims to meet the needs of diverse groups of learners and other stakeholders. Each AP serves local, regional, national and international needs, and makes a distinctive contribution to the university partnership. Some are relatively large colleges in urban centres. Others are smaller institutions, including some whose primary focus is on research. All, however, have a student-centred culture. In addition to the main campuses, the university partnership also provides educational opportunities through a network of more than 70 learning centres located throughout the Highlands and Islands,

Moray and Perthshire. Much of our curriculum is specifically designed to be accessible across multiple sites. Our blended learning approach makes extensive use of ICT and video-conferencing to enable students and staff to work together, wherever they are physically located.

Being locally based, regional in structure and having national and international reach, we want to act as a force for economic, social and cultural change across our region as well as meeting the needs of individual learners. Our approach to equality and diversity therefore needs to be regional as well as local in perspective and will have to take account of parity of experience and outcome in very different contexts: from city-based campuses to remote, rural learning centres and from students in large classes to individuals studying online.

Equality within our Strategic Vision and Plan 2015-20

The University's [Strategic Vision and Plan 2015-20](#) has three broad themes, two of which underpin our equalities work and are classified under the following titles – 'our students' and 'the university for all of our region'.

Our students are of central importance. "Students must be at the centre of our university. This means meeting the needs and expectations of a diverse geographically dispersed student body" (Strategic Vision and Plan 2015).

The 2015 plan expands this – "we will be active partners in community planning within our region and contribute to tackling inequality, improving services, enhancing training and skills development and the promotion of sustainable economic growth" (Strategic Vision and Plan 2015).

Within these two themes we set out our aims and a range of objectives to enable the University to secure its mission which is "to have a transformational impact on the prospects of our region, its economy, its people and its communities" (UHI 2015).

The university's strategic goals therefore directly impact on effective implementation and prioritisation of equality mainstreaming themes and equality outcomes.

Our equalities responsibilities

Meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

The public sector equality duty (PSED) came into force on 5 April 2011, replacing the previous separate equality duties for race, disability and gender. The PSED is supported by specific duties for each nation. In Scotland these commenced on 27 May 2012. Scottish colleges and HEIs, and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), are covered by the PSED and the specific duties.

As a public sector organisation, the University of the Highlands and Islands has responsibility to report on all Public Sector Equalities Duties requirements. The Academic Partners also

have responsibility for publishing their own reports as organisations separately listed under the specific duties regulations ie all institutions are individually responsible for meeting the duties, including when operating in a regional context.

The following Academic partners are currently 'listed' and have a duty to report:

- Inverness College
- Lews Castle College
- Moray College
- North Highland College
- Orkney College
- Perth College
- Sabhal Mor Ostaig
- Shetland College
- West Highland College

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) - Reporting

The Equality and Human Rights Commission is responsible for regulating the public sector equality duty and has produced two reports which set out their findings following the publishing of listed authorities' previous reports:

- [Measuring Up? Performance](#) gives an overview of how well in general, listed public sector authorities' complied with the Duties.
- [Measuring UP? Practice](#) sets out examples of good practice and common areas for improvement to assist local authorities in preparing for their next reporting requirements in 2017, in particular through improved evidence collection to support better and more effective reporting in the future.

Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) - Reporting

The Equality Challenge Unit receives funds from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to support improvement on equality through guidance, advice and strategic enhancement projects. It has been drawing information from institutions' published equality reports and has completed a review of colleges' performance of the specific duties reporting requirements in April 2015. The report, Reporting on equality: Colleges and higher education institutions' performance of the Scottish specific equality duties requirements 2015 was published in November 2015 and makes specific reference to the work of institutions within the university partnership:

- the University's Executive Office, for the progress made in coordinating and aligning the equality work of the University's partner colleges
- Perth College UHI, for the effective methods used to demonstrate progress towards achieving their Equality Outcomes
- Shetland College UHI, for their unique, collaborative regional approach to reporting

Further external drivers which support and influence our equalities work

Equality within the Highlands and Islands Regional Outcome Agreements

The University is required to demonstrate its commitment to upholding the legislative duties for both staff and students by embedding information relevant to the Scottish Funding Council's priorities in the Highlands and Islands Regional Further and Higher Outcome Agreements

Target:

- **equality and diversity targets are embedded within the Highlands and Islands Regional Outcome Agreement**

(see Highlands and Islands Regional Tertiary Outcome Agreement 2017-2020)

Further Education Access and Inclusion Strategies

Each of the Highlands and Islands colleges is developing an evidence-based Access and Inclusion Strategy in 2016-17, in accordance with SFC's 2015-16 review of the implementation, outcomes and future prospects of Extended Learning Support (ELS) funds (renamed the Access and Inclusion Fund and separate to the new credit funding model introduced from AY 2015-16 onwards for further education). These strategies will reflect SFC's increasing ambitions for appropriate assessment of need and funding allocation methodology for access and inclusion in relation to each region.

SFC Gender Action Plan

We are required by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to develop a Gender Action Plan which sets out our plans to address complex gender imbalances ie

- the historical severe gender imbalances in some subject areas.
- the gap between male and female participants in undergraduate study
- gender balance on our Board of Management
- gender equality in relation to staff
- the gender pay gap

Each of the region's colleges is also developing a Gender Action Plan or an evidence-base in 2016-17 in relation to its approaches to addressing gender inequality.

We welcome the opportunity to focus on this gender work in partnership with the Scottish Funding Council.

Target:

- **develop a Gender Action Plan**

The Scottish Code of HE Governance

The University is required to meet the principles of good governance set out in the Scottish Code of HE Governance which involves diversity requirements.

Duty to report on the diversity of Court membership

[The Equality Act \(Specific Duties\) \(Scotland\) Amendment Regulations 2016](#) came into force on 18 March 2016, and specifically the implementation of the new regulation 6A.

Regulation 6A requires that Scottish Ministers gather information on the relevant protected characteristics of board members of a listed authority, and to provide this information to the listed authority in question. In turn, listed authorities with a board are required to include in their mainstreaming reports which are part of the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012, details of:

- the number of men and of women who have been board members of the authority during the period covered by the report;
- how the information provided about the relevant protected characteristics of its board members has been used so far; and
- how the authority proposes to use the information provided in the future to promote greater diversity of board membership.

We await confirmation as to how the Scottish Government intend to progress this work.

Court gender balance

01 January 2013 – 31 July 2016

Gender	Male		Female		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.
University of the Highlands and Islands	34	74	12	26	46

Full protected characteristics data of members of the governing body ('University Court') were not collected during the previous recruitment and appointment exercise, but is being requested during current and all future recruitment exercises. The university is currently providing opportunities for a wide demographic - including those with protected characteristics – on its governing body, through inclusive job descriptions, local and national advertising (including local groups), use of the public appointments register, and via training and appointments to sub-committees of potential future governors."

In March 2015 the University joined the 30% club <http://30percentclub.org/> with a goal of 30% of women representing the Court.

Following the 2014 Ministerial Guidance on College Sector Board Appointments, the University developed a subsequent document 'Process for appointment of chairs and board members to incorporated college boards.' The university has issued this to all APs to support the appointment process.

Target:

- **governing bodies across the partnership are representative of the diversity of their communities**

Qualification Assurance Agency Scotland (QAA Scotland)

The University is required to effectively manage the equality and diversity of its student population, including the arrangements for identifying and responding to student needs. This includes showing how as an institution we are progressing equality and diversity in relation to learning, teaching and assessment.

The QAA conducted an Enhancement-led Review (ELIR) of the University in 2016 and considered the above.

Comments (QAA 2016):

- **“the University has an effective approach to supporting equality and diversity across the partnership.”**
- **“UHI has a strong ethos and a positive approach to the support of disabled students.”**

Developing the Young Workforce (DYW)

The DYW report asks colleges and HEIs to:

Gender balance:	address gender imbalances in some Modern Apprenticeship frameworks address gender imbalances in education and training address gender stereotyping in occupations and careers
Young Black and Minority Ethnic (BME)	widen pathways to encourage into employment
Young disabled people:	support difficult transitions through education and into employment after they leave education
Young Care Leavers:	ensure more positive educational outcomes
UHI work-based learning hub:	

The hub is co-ordinating the development of work-based learning relating to Developing the Young Workforce across the region and the cross-partnership regional schools group is providing a focus for the further development of the senior phase school curriculum.

The activities of the work-based learning hub strongly align with this priority aim:

- All foundation and graduate level apprenticeship frameworks have been developed in response to industry demand and matched to priority sectors. Development has been informed by SIPs and regional skills assessments and led by industry leaders and representatives alongside Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) institutions
- STEM and health and social care subjects and career paths are strongly featured throughout the frameworks that have been developed
- Foundation Apprenticeships (FAs) and Graduate Level Apprenticeships (GLAs) have been developed in line with, and are clearly communicated in terms of, the SCQF levels
- The programmes are work-based by design and principle, ensuring knowledge, skills and competence are delivered in FE and HE contexts
- They support retention through integrating learning with sustainable employment opportunities and increased links to the world of work
- Local development and delivery of the FAs and GLAs are being carried out in partnerships with local employers, meeting their local needs while ensuring transferability of competence and experience to other labour market opportunities and sectors
- Articulation/progression from FE to HE is strongly supported through the development of the apprenticeship family pathway, with natural progression routes from the Foundation Apprenticeship through to both Modern Apprenticeship and Graduate Level Apprenticeship opportunities.
- The introduction of Foundation Apprenticeships into the senior phase of school has increased, and will continue to increase, employer involvement with schools and senior phase pupils.

British Sign Language (BSL) Plan

The Scottish Parliament passed the historic BSL (Scotland) Act in September 2015. The Act will lay the foundation for future improvements for deaf and Deafblind BSL users. The Act means there will be the setting up of a National Advisory Group (NAG) which will produce the first BSL National Plan in 2017.

The university partnership will be required to develop a number of individual plans across the region to show how we allow access to our services to the BSL community, including deafblind people who use BSL. To support this development, a working group will be created to collaboratively support each other in the creation of plans and to identify common themes; in a similar way to our Corporate Parenting plan process. It is expected that training from Deaf Action should be available in the near future to provide guidance on plan content. Some groundwork will be done to determine the number of students declaring a hearing

impairment and to find out details from around the partnership of current facilities in place to support those who are deaf or hearing impaired. This will be done with input from members of the cross-partnership Student Support Group (SSG).

Target:

- **To develop a BSL Plan**

Our approach to mainstreaming equality

Following the appointment of our Equality and Diversity Adviser in August 2014, significant consultation and investigation has been undertaken across the partnership to identify how equality is being mainstreamed within the Academic partners, on a pan-university basis. This work is to support and advance the implementation of the university's policies and strategies on equality and diversity.

Two groups have been established to take forward this agenda. The Equality Outcomes Group meets quarterly to look at equalities issues relating to students, curriculum and staff. Its main aims are to support University Court in the promotion of equality and diversity and in ensuring that the university's strategic goals direct effective implementation and prioritisation of equality mainstreaming themes and equality outcomes. Representatives are drawn from key groups across the university eh HR Practitioners Group and Staff Development Practitioners Group.

The second established group is an Equalities Practitioner Network: this brings together staff from the Academic Partners with an interest in, or responsibility for, equality and diversity. This is a more informal forum, aimed at information sharing and awareness-raising. Equalities initiatives identified both externally and internally by the university are effectively disseminated across the partnership.

The creation of these two groups is a significant step forward in how the university manages and enhances its operations and strategy in relation to equalities.

Guidance from within the following key documents has been taken into consideration when identifying the mainstreaming of equality across the partnership:

Key external documents

ECU (2016) *Setting equality outcomes: guidance for Scottish institutions*

<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/setting-equality-outcomes-guidance-for-scottish-institutions/>

ECU (2015) *Toolkit: how to embed equality in outcome agreements - colleges*

<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Embedding-equality-in-outcome-agreements-colleges-2016-17.pdf>

ECU (2015) *Toolkit: how to embed equality in outcome agreements - HEIs*
<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Embedding-equality-in-outcome-agreements-HEIs-2016-17.pdf>

ECU (2015) *Equality in colleges in Scotland 2015: Highlands and Islands statistical tables*
<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-in-colleges-in-scotland-statistical-report-2015/>

Education Scotland (2014) *Developing the Young Workforce - Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy: Implementing the Recommendations of the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce*
https://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/DYWResponseYouthEmpl%20Strategy_tcm4-853595.pdf

EHRC (2015) *Measuring up? Report 4: Performance*
http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/publication_pdf/measuring_up_4_performance_final_1.pdf

EHRC (2015) *Measuring up? Report 4: Practice*
<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/publication/measuring-report-4-practice-report-public-authorities-practice-meeting-scottish-specific-equality>

Scottish Government (2015) *Equality Evidence Toolkit for Public Authorities*
<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/03/6567>

SFC (2015) *College Outcome Agreements (AY 2016-17)*
http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/GUI_SFCGD152015_DeliveringCollegeOutcomeAgreement_sAY201/College_outcome_agreement_guidance_201617.pdf

SFC (2015) *University Outcome Agreement Guidance for AY 2014-15 to 2016-17: Refresh*
http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/GUI_SFCGD162015_UniversityOutcomeAgreementGuidanceforAY/HE_Outcome_Agreement_Guidance_2016-17.pdf

(2013) *The Scottish Code of Good HE Governance*
<http://www.scottishuniversitygovernance.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Scottish-Code-of-Good-HE-Governance.pdf>

Key internal documents

Identified equalities objectives, targets, initiatives and evidence from within the following internal documents, have been collated and used to show how we are mainstreaming equality:

UHI (2014) Highlands and Islands Regional Further and Higher Outcome Agreements
2015/16

UHI (2015) Progress report on the mainstreaming of equality and diversity within the University of the Highlands and Islands and our planned equality outcomes 2013-2017

UHI (2015) draft Reflective Analysis, Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) 2015/16

UHI (2015) Strategic Vision and Plan 2015/20

UHI (2015) draft Operating Plan 2015/16

UHI (2014) Highlands and Islands Regional Further and Higher Outcome Agreements
2014/15 to 2016/17

UHI (2015) Widening Access Framework

UHI (2015) Student Support Services Operational Plan 2015/16

UHI (2016) Athena SWAN Bronze university award application

QAA (2016) Enhancement-led Institutional Review of University of the Highlands and Islands:
Reflective analysis 2015-16

UHI (2017) Highlands and Islands Regional Tertiary Outcome Agreement 2017 -2020

Key Regional Themes

Having analysed previous mainstreaming reports and equality outcomes from across the partnership, the following essential themes have been identified as being key areas where equality is being mainstreamed:

- Leadership, Governance and Management
- Stakeholder engagement and partnerships
- Data and disclosure
- Students
- Staff development
- Staffing

Leadership, Governance and Management

The Court is the governing body of the university, and has responsibility for the determination of the educational character and mission of the university and for overseeing its activities. Its constitution was recently changed to accommodate the university's new responsibilities in relation to further education.

The Court and all our academic committees have student membership, often represented by HISA principal officers, although not exclusively.

Academic Partner Principals and other senior managers play a key role in governance, management and executive structures of the university partnership. This encompasses both representing their own AP and leading on behalf of the partnership.

In December 2014 Court members undertook training delivered by the ECU which clarified Court responsibilities in relation to the University's equalities work.

A number of Academic Partners report that their own Boards have undertaken equalities training and that an action is in place to tackle Board under-representation.

Equality and Diversity: Scotinform Staff Survey 2014

In 2014, and again in 2016, UHI partners commissioned Scotinform to carry out a staff survey. The overall aim of the research was to conduct a survey of staff for the partner organisations to provide feedback on topics identified by the partners, to provide feedback on each of the topic areas and to identify staff views on the overall employee experience.

On both occasions, a mean* score of 3.8 was recorded in response to the question:

I am confident that equality concerns within my organisation will be dealt with promptly and appropriately.

(Mean* scores are based on 1= disagree strongly and 5 = agree strongly)

Targets:

- **a University Equality and Diversity Policy is in place, approved and implemented**
- **governing bodies across the partnership are representative of the diversity of the communities they serve**

Stakeholder Engagement and Partnerships

Reasonable steps are being taken across the partnership to involve local and national equality groups and communities. The aim is to focus on those who can contribute to the preparation and implementation of equality outcomes which are likely to make the biggest difference in tackling inequality within the organisation's sphere of influence.

Most APs report that they are working with other agencies and organisations who support and work with people from under-represented groups and plan to strengthen and develop links. Good practice where stakeholders and community groups support the development of APs equality work is shared through the Equalities Practitioner Network.

Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs)

The colleges of the Highlands and Islands have historically worked closely with their local CPPs and helped shape local priorities as expressed in the Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) of the various CPPs across the region. It is absolutely vital that the region's colleges are key players in community planning and fully integrated into these increasingly important partnerships. Legislation in the form of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015

has strengthened the statutory base for community planning and the voices of communities in the decisions that matter to them, and new Local Outcomes Improvement Plans (LOIPs) are being developed to replace SOAs.

UHI will strengthen its representation on the CPPs across the region, in the form of membership from Executive Office and College teams on CCP Boards, Community Partnerships, District Partnerships, Economic Development and Employability fora and Developing the Young Workforce groups. They will work closely with other local service providers to ensure that the needs of the people who use these services are met, with a particular focus on those who need these services most.

A key focus for CPPs will be to address levels of inequality and socio-economic disadvantage, identifying local actions and priorities, and to this end, UHI and partner colleges will contribute to the development of evidence-based LOIPs and Locality Plans, which should reflect the needs of local communities, and people who are socio-economically disadvantaged. Highland Council proposes to use a combination of the Socio Economic Performance Index (SEP) as a means of identifying rural communities and understanding inequality and deprivation in these communities and the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) for identifying concentrations of deprivation, and will initially complete Locality Plans for these communities.

Targets:

- **evidence that stakeholders, partners, community groups, people with protected characteristics and/or their representatives are consulted as part of the Equality Impact Assessment process is collated and shared through the Equalities Practitioner Network (EPN)**
- **equality and diversity initiatives where stakeholders etc from a variety of backgrounds have been consulted and involved are shared through an equality and diversity resource bank on the University staff intranet**
- **a database of collaborative partnerships representative of a wide variety of protected backgrounds is developed and shared through the EPN and through an equality and diversity resource bank on the University staff intranet**

Data and Disclosure

Student data

Student Data Reporting Group

We have established the Student Data Reporting Group (SDRG) to review the reporting functionality of the student records system, to streamline Key Performance Indicators (KPI) reporting, and enable more effective monitoring. SDRG has a remit for both FE and HE student data and is tasked with developing an accessible, user-friendly portal through which all reports will be accessed, and to develop a series of standardised reports across a wide range of student data reporting requirements, both FE and HE. Prioritising and overseeing the development of such reports will enable us to meet external requirements in the light of our new responsibilities as the regional strategic body. Additional resource has been committed to move this forward.

For HE provision, a standard minimum dataset of KPIs relating to retention, progression, achievement and student population profile (including equalities data), has been agreed for inclusion in annual monitoring Self Evaluation Documents (SEDs). A KPI report format with improved visual presentation has been developed, displaying three-year trend data to support staff in monitoring KPIs at all levels and evaluating the impact of enhancement initiatives. 'Dashboard' style reports are also available to facilitate live monitoring of, for example, applications and enrolments against agreed targets.

In addition to an annual student demographics report, a large number of additional reports on HE student demographics, performance and UHI performance indicators are available to staff by using the UHI core reporting service on-line. The 'Diversity' core reports show data for age, gender, ethnicity and disability by Academic Partner and by Course.

Analysis of Higher Education (HE) Data 2015-2016 (headcount)

Gender

We have more females than males studying on both our full-time and part-time HE courses

Females full-time 35%

Males full-time 29%

Females part-time 22%

Males part-time 14%

Numbers have remained consistent with previous years.

Age

The majority of our full time students continue to be from the under 21 age group ie 34% of our total number of students

The majority of our part time students are aged 30-49 ie 17% of our total number of students

Disability

10% of our full-time HE students disclosed that they have a disability

4% of our part-time HE students disclosed that they have a disability

Of those who declared a disability, 5% declared 'dyslexia or other learning difficulties' and 5% declared 'other disability not listed'.

This is consistent with previous years.

Ethnicity

The majority of our HE students identified as 'white' ie 93%.

4% identified as being from a Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) background.

3% of our HE students did not disclose their Ethnicity.

Data is consistent with previous years where in 2014/15, 94% of students declared White Ethnicity.

Collecting student protected characteristics data

Collection of protected characteristics for all HE students across the partnership began in 2013/14. In addition to the information already collected (gender, age, disability, and ethnicity), the university began collecting the newer protected characteristics:

- Gender re-assignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation

The majority of Academic Partners collect student data across all protected characteristics (pc) at the enrolment stage. A generic online application form for all students across the partnership was put in place for 2016-2017. This enables the gathering of all pc data at application. The APs report that work needs to be done to encourage students to disclose their protected characteristics and many have set an action around this.

Analysis of HE student protected characteristics data

Analysis of the cross-partner HE student data collected from 2013-2016 shows:

Overall, the majority (99.98%) of students disclose their Age, Disability and Sex.

We are seeing a steady increase in the number of HE students disclosing their Ethnicity.

Our HE students are least likely to disclose their Religion/Belief or their Sexual orientation (approx. 8%)

Our part-time HE students are least likely to disclose their Ethnicity/Gender Identity/Religion/Belief/Sexual Orientation however we are seeing a steady increase in part-time students disclosing their Gender Identity and their Sexual Orientation.

For the protected characteristic Religion/Belief, we are seeing a steady decrease in the numbers of full-time HE students wishing to disclose.

Targets:

- **across the partnership, data is collected for 'all' student protected characteristics through a supportive culture**
- **core data reports for both HE and FE students are identified and analysed in relation to under-representation, low retention and low achievement for protected groups with findings disseminated across the partnership, for action**
- **demonstrable good practice in reporting, analysis and action planning processes for student protected characteristics data, is enhanced and shared across the partnership**

Staff data

Collecting staff protected characteristics data

Most of the Academic Partners(APs) and Executive Office(EO) are collecting data across all protected characteristics and have actions in place to encourage improved disclosure. Similarly to the case with students, APs report that many staff are unwilling to disclose their protected characteristics and require reassurance that the data will be held securely.

Reporting on staff data

All APs are required to fully meeting their duties under the PSED ie APs and EO are required to report on and publish full data and this includes analysis by the protected characteristics across recruitment, retention and development.

The university and each of the partner colleges are required to develop and publish a Gender Action Plan which sets out plans to address:

- gender equality in relation to staff
- the gender pay gap

Reporting on governing body data

The university and each of the partner colleges are required to develop and publish a Gender Action Plan which sets out plans to address any gender imbalances of their governing bodies.

Targets:

- across the partnership, data is collected for all staff protected characteristics through a supportive culture
- staff protected characteristics data is fully analysed. Identified inequalities are addressed.
- 2 years of data and analysis on recruitment, retention and development of all staff is reported
- a clear section on progress in collecting and using employee equality data is shown in all Academic Partner (AP) and Executive Office (EO) Employee Data Reports, as part of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)
- areas of staff under-representation of protected characteristics are identified and addressed
- governing bodies across the partnership are representative of the diversity of the communities they serve
- develop a Gender Action Plan

Publishing Gender Pay Gap information

Across the sectors, although colleges and HEIs met their duties in 2015 in publishing pay gap information, reporting methods were noted as inconsistent and this affected transparency. For example, some excluded part time staff or senior staff, and some did not present an overall gap.

New 2017 reporting requirements specify that institutions with 150 staff or more are to also publish pay gaps in relation to Disability and Ethnicity and those with between 20 and 149 staff are for the first time, to publish for gender only, pay gap information and a statement on equal pay, including occupational segregation.

Target:

- **Academic Partners (APs) and Executive Office to report consistently with regards to their Pay Gaps as part of the Public Sector Equality Duty.**
- **APs with 150 staff or more to publish Pay Gaps for Gender, disability and Ethnicity.**
- **APs with between 20 and 149 staff to publish gender pay gap information and a statement on equal pay, including occupational segregation, for gender.**

Equality in college in Scotland 2015: Highlands and Islands statistical tables

In order to support regional benchmarking and assist colleges to identify equality challenges at a regional level, particularly where data systems are in the process of being aligned, ECU has produced data tables for each multi-college and merger region. These tables provide equality-focused analysis of information on students during the 2013-14 academic year and participation data from 2006-07 to 2013-14.

For the Highlands and Islands Region however, the data sets are only available up to SCQF level 6-7 and therefore do not include a significant amount of the university's HE data. The data for regional FE provision is very useful.

Supporting Equality and Diversity in the Student Population

Accommodation

We are working through a programme of building dedicated student residences across the region operated by a facilities management company. Two residences opened in 2016 at Inverness College UHI and West Highland College UHI (Fort William). Phase two residences in Inverness, Elgin and Dornoch are due to open in September 2017. A number of rooms in each residence will be reserved for priority applicants including those with a declared disability and care leavers.

Blended learning

We have adopted the 'blended learning' approach to delivering our curriculum, with the 'blend' varying from fully online to completely face-to-face, making use of video-conference (VC) and virtual learning environments (VLE) as appropriate. The roll-out of this approach was systematically coordinated through the Curriculum for the 21st Century (C21C) project, which was established as we prepared for a phase of significant growth in student numbers. It aimed to make as much of the curriculum available in as many locations as was academically and financially sustainable, and promote equivalence of academic support for all students. Both VC and VLE will continue to be key in our use of technology to support curriculum delivery, and will be addressed within the development of the revised Learning and Teaching Strategy. We have for many years been a leader in the use of VC for curriculum delivery, using this technology to support synchronous learning sessions to connect lecturers and students across multiple sites. A recording function now allows students to access lectures at a time convenient to them, optimising flexibility for students and enabling staff to work more effectively with student groups, e.g. through more tutorial sessions. VC use has been further enhanced with the addition of Cisco Jabber technology linked into the main VC system, allowing students to access their lectures and tutorials from their own desktop.

A 'Blended Learning Standards checklist' has been developed and promoted to all staff. Guidance is given within the document supports the development of 'accessible' materials and emphasises the importance of ensuring that all materials and content meet equality requirements ie 'issues should be taught in a way that will not subject students to discrimination or harassment, stereotypes should be challenged and inequality addressed through positive representations of under-represented groups'.

HEA Embedding Equality and Diversity in the Curriculum Strategic Enhancement Project

Scottish universities and colleges are required by law to manage, design and develop their learning, teaching and assessment in a manner that eliminates discrimination, advances equality of opportunity and fosters good relations.

Following a successful 'expression of interest', the University was selected to work with HEA Scotland alongside five other teams from Scottish institutions through a structured development programme designed to enable HEIs to tailor equality and diversity mainstreaming initiatives to their own disciplinary, institutional and/or sector priorities. This 1 year project – Embedding Equality and Diversity in the Curriculum Strategic enhancement programme has facilitated the development of an initiative to promote inclusive assessment processes and will have a direct learning and teaching focus and/or develop and support learning and teaching activities.

The university project lead is currently also supporting a related HEA project ie the development of a draft programme-level embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum (EEDC) standard matrix

Internationalisation in the curriculum

Provision in English for Speakers of Other Languages and other foreign language skills: Internationalisation is a cross-cutting theme in our 2015-20 strategic vision and plan. We want our students to be global citizens. We believe that this enhances their employability and enriches their lives. It is also important to us that the horizons of our staff encompass innovation in their areas of specialism from across the world. There are already many international dimensions to the university in research, learning and teaching and knowledge exchange. We want to build on these, to embed internationalisation more generally across the university partnership.

Programme structures

In parallel with the developments to enhance the flexibility and quality of delivery and support we have continued our development of flexible, and sometimes innovative, approaches to programme structure. The use of SQA Higher National awards as elements of degree programmes has been useful as a developmental process for students and staff alike. Although we have increasingly moved to full four year degrees, we have deliberately retained the so-called "1 + 2" (HNC plus 2 years degree study) or "2+1" structures These structures serve to provide some students with a more graduated change in learning style as well as facilitating inward articulation from other institutions.

The university and each of the partner colleges are required to develop and publish a Gender Action Plan which sets out plans to address:

- the historical severe gender imbalances in some subject areas.
- the gap between male and female participants in undergraduate study

Target:

- **processes to review degree programme frameworks established to make curriculum more accessible, flexible and appropriate to student and employer needs**
- **develop Gender Action Plan**

Personal Academic Tutors (PATs)

The Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) role is a crucial one in supporting students during their studies and is known to have a significant positive impact on the student experience and satisfaction. PATs act as a key contact point for students, particularly important for those who may not be regularly (if ever) attending on campus. The development and implementation of the PAT role is a major element in supporting equivalence of experience across our student population, and sets out minimum levels of engagement with every student. PATs provide an introductory meeting in the first semester each year, as part of an extended induction and the specific course and year of study. In addition, there is a minimum of one academic advisory session each semester on an individual basis, where the student's academic progress is reviewed. PATs undertake signposting and early referral to appropriate specialist support for issues such as ICT access, library and learning resources, finance and personal concerns. They also provide information on academic regulations, guidance on plagiarism and copyright matters, advice on study methods and academic writing skills and provide access to study support.

A working group was set up to review the PAT role in 2014-15, in the light of student feedback which indicated that there was some variability in the implementation and understanding of the PAT role across the partnership. This led to some adjustments to the role: for example, to regularise the number of students and courses an individual PAT can be asked to cover, but we are continuing to monitor the risk of overload within the PAT role in the context of other administrative and teaching responsibilities staff may have.

We also reviewed the PAT staff resources and guides, and identified the need for improved accessibility to these, using a range of mobile devices. The existing resources were available in a number of places including the intranet and VLE; the route to accessing these was not always clear and some PATs who did not use the VLE were at a disadvantage. We commissioned a project through the Educational Development Unit (EDU) to create a self-directed online resource, built from the existing text-based resources with additional content provided by the EDU project team, which will assist in the induction of new PATs and be a reference point for existing PATs. The layout and feel is similar to the Essential Student Skills resource developed by the EDU, and it is expected to have a notable impact supporting PATs, and providing greater consistency in the way the PAT role is carried out.

Essential Student Skills (ESS) online

The need for high quality induction and support materials is well-understood, as is the need for them to be available to all our students irrespective of course, location or mode of study. Different APs and programmes within the university have developed local induction and support materials over time, with materials often covering similar topics. Some of these resources were refined over several years, reflecting valuable feedback but not all students had access to the same materials and so the benefits of this work had not been universally shared.

The Educational Development Unit (EDU)'s Essential Student Skills project sought to level the playing field and offer all students the same high quality resources via an online portal. The resources are designed to cover the whole student journey and are generic in nature. Each resource can be used as a 'stand-alone' resource or be contextualised by academic staff for use in their own subjects. Using a single point of delivery ensures equity of experience and the currency of the material with only one version needing to be updated. Students are able to become familiar with the resources prior to enrolment; a considerable benefit in preparation for study. In addition they can access the online resources in their own time and return to them as often as required throughout their studies.

Most of the APs report that they have activities in place to support and develop student awareness of equality and diversity and plan to implement new ways to further increase student equalities awareness, appreciation and knowledge.

Target:

- **develop pan university resources to ensure student understanding and knowledge of equality and diversity**

Libraries service

Students have access to library services at their own AP (which cater for the needs of both HE and FE students) including print books and computing facilities, as well as a substantial e-resource collection (journals, e-books and other materials) which is managed by the university e-resources manager. These are available on any compatible device via an internet connection, and accessible to all students 24/7. The process of finding information from both the physical and digital parts of the library has been made much simpler with the library search engine Multisearch, which provides a 'Googlelike' way of searching many sources at the same time. We are also developing a series of "Lib Guides" linked to the VLE which will steer students to e-resources related to their modules. Students are also able to access, free of charge, the print book stock of the entire partnership (with the exception of one specialist institution) via the inter-site loan system.

The libraries service has undergone a number of reviews in the last three years, responding in part to student feedback which identified this as a recurrent area of lower satisfaction, although they are very positive about the support provided by the libraries staff.

A working group convened in 2013 to review aspects of the university partnership's library provision had the following remit:

- To consider how the equivalence of student access to library resources is monitored and enhanced
- To consider how the libraries service enhances the student experience in terms of inter-library cooperation and resource sharing and alignment with Subject Network and programme teams
- To recommend changes arising from these considerations

The libraries service was also the focus of the first student support service review in 2014-15

The reviews identified that, since each AP's library service had evolved to respond to local student populations and needs, this had led to areas where there was a lack of service consistency, for example relating to access to study spaces, core texts, and IT facilities. More positively, through the review process, libraries staff were able to share expertise and best practice across the partnership and thus enhance the service available at individual campuses. This led to the establishment of a more formalised libraries practitioner group, with a redefined role. We have invested in leadership of the group, which has developed an action plan to enhance student experience, supported and monitored by QAEC as a key enhancement priority. This plan includes the establishment of minimum service levels, while recognising that not all aspects of the service can or need to be the same across the partnership, and further definition of KPIs and targets, including usage data.

There was also an identified need to raise awareness of the library services, especially among students who do not often attend on campus. The libraries staff are increasingly using social media and other proactive ways to reach those students. The action plan has already led to demonstrable progress including:

- All students at all locations can now borrow 15 books at one time
- Agreement to fund postage costs for return of book loans for distance learning students
- Purchase of reading list software to enable students to link directly from reading lists in VLE to library catalogue
- Opening hours at all library locations to be reviewed and mapped against local students' needs

Student Mentoring

Student mentoring brings together students to share their knowledge and experience in order to help each other progress. We provide training and a structure for more experienced students to help those new to the University. This is primarily achieved through study groups and small group mentoring, although options are also available for 1:1 mentoring. Options are also available to support students who wish to assist each other virtually for when they are based at another campus.

Careers and employability support

The Strategic Plan identifies clear aspirations in relation to employability, with a CPI based on DLHE outcomes for graduates. This survey showed that 92% of our graduates went on to work or study in 2013-14, slightly above the national benchmark, and we aim to maintain or improve this outcome. The Careers and Employability Centre supports and facilitates the development, management and delivery of careers guidance and placement services across partnership. This includes coordination of practitioner groups, events such as Employability Week, policy and process development, management of the Jobs Database and dissemination of the regional jobs board to key contacts. The careers education, information, advice and guidance policy was revised and updated in 2013, and sets out how the Careers and Employability Centre works in partnership with AP services.

The Careers and Employability Centre has also led the development of the Skills and Employability Award, and a range of career management advice sheets. An annual seminar programme is delivered by VC across the network, with strong input from careers professionals and employers, which was shortlisted for the AGCAS (Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services) Awards for Excellence: Technology Award in 2013. Since not all of our students can gain face-to-face access to professionally qualified careers advisers, we have a substantial online resource and e-guidance service. Students can download advice sheets, information on workshop events and career mentoring, access seminar recordings, register on the jobs database and book an appointment through our 'speak to an adviser' service.

The student placement policy was recently reviewed and is supported by guidance on expectations and legislative requirements for tutors, employers and students, including an addendum on equality and diversity considerations. The EDU is undertaking a project to develop user-friendly, online resources to enhance student experience in getting the most out of their placement, to improve understanding of respective responsibilities set out within the policy, and to ensure that legal obligations are met. The placement practitioner network, established as part of the policy review process, is developing as a forum for sharing practice and CPD opportunities.

Targets:

- **mechanisms to increase breadth and depth of employer engagement with our curriculum are established - to advance equality of opportunity for those with protected backgrounds**
- **all students are adequately supported in their preparation for employment or further study**

Widening access

Our university was established to bring higher education to the communities of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, including those in remote and rural areas. Our mission relates not only these regions, but to all people within these communities and beyond who choose to study with us.

In line with our equalities work, as indicated earlier, two out of the three themes within the Strategic Plan are also very relevant to widening access, these being 'our students' and 'the university for all of our region'. Within these themes we have set specific targets in relation to priority groups and progression from FE to HE, and progress towards these is monitored by Court through relevant KPIs.

We are committed to widening access and academic recruitment based on merit, and achieving a fair balance of entrants to higher education. Our work in this area is embedded within mainstream practice and summarised in the Widening Access Framework and we monitor student populations at programme level on an annual basis. With reference to protected characteristic groups, we seek to achieve a student population that is representative of our region.

Equality Challenge Unit - Attracting Diversity Project

We began working with the Equality Challenge Unit in 2016 on the 'Attracting diversity: equality in student recruitment in Scottish HEIs' project, which has helped us to understand the underrepresentation of females in engineering and an initiative to develop a university Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths (STEM) Strategy. Much STEM work is currently being undertaken across the partnership with several initiatives to address gender inequality. Developing a STEM Strategy will help to bring this work together in a more cohesive approach. On completion of the project it is also planned to have a model of approach in place, based on the work that has been carried, to address underrepresentation of any protected characteristics in any subject.

Targets:

- **available progression pathways, entry and re-entry points are reviewed to ensure that our curriculum is accessible to as many learners as possible and supportive of lifelong learning**
- **more even patterns of participation by those from protected characteristic groups, including an improvement in the gender balance of the student population and in imbalanced subjects**
- **positive interventions are planned and agreed to encourage higher student recruitment in both FE and HE from SIMD, fragile areas and areas of rural deprivation**
- **the University works with groups with low levels of participation to remove perceived and real obstacles and develop responsive provision**
- **to develop a university STEM Strategy**
- **to develop a model of approach to address the underrepresentation of protected characteristics in subject areas**

Admissions

We recognise that admissions policy and practice are vital aspects of widening access, and we are committed to recruitment and selection processes that are fair, non-discriminatory and

open. We undertook a review of admissions during 2013, with a view to benchmarking against sector practice and aligning with the UK Code of Practice, which led to revised policy, processes and regulations.

Contextualised Admissions has been established as part of the admissions process across the partnership within the current admissions cycle ie for 2017-18 HE entry. Training was given to admissions staff at the recent Annual Admissions Conference in November 2016.

We will continue to monitor effectiveness and consistency through analysis of applications and enrolment data. Further recommendations are being taken forward to support our aims in widening access, as it is acknowledged that overcoming historic disadvantage requires more than simply ensuring fairness.

It has been identified also that there is a need for training amongst academic staff who make the assessments on contextualised applicants, before we can be confident that this policy is being implemented.

Target:

- **Develop and deliver training to academic staff who make the assessments on contextualised applicants**

Access routes

Most of our programmes have a range of access routes, as well as the standard entry qualifications of Scottish Highers or A-levels, including FE qualifications, and many of our students indicate an FE qualification as their highest qualification on entry. For people who have been away from study for some time, or don't have the standard entry requirements, we offer a number of specific Access to HE courses, to boost learner confidence, and to provide the necessary skills to study successfully at HE level and underpinning subject knowledge.

Articulation

We welcome applicants with a HNC or HND, and normally accept full credit transfer for direct entry to year 2 or 3 of a degree programme. While we are not within an SFC-funded regional articulation hub, we seek to ensure that students have the best range of progression options available to them. We have had an articulation agreement with North East Scotland College (NESCol) since 2011. Since then we have worked to increase the number of course links available, and have cooperated with NESCol to promote these opportunities to their students. The agreement is reviewed annually to ensure that all possible articulation routes are included. While the numbers using these links are modest, they are healthy given that the majority of NESCol students are likely to continue study in Aberdeen on completion of their college course. We recognise that articulating students require enhanced support and encourage these students to make use of student and study support services we provide. The success of the NESCol agreement prompted us to enter into a similar agreement in 2015 with Dundee and Angus College.

SWAP East

The University is a partner of SWAP East (Scottish Wider Access Programme), a consortium of FE colleges and universities. Its aims are to promote to higher education for adult learners who have been out of education for some time, who have few or no formal qualifications, or who come from traditionally underrepresented groups. Students who successfully complete their SWAP access course are able to enrol on to our HN or degree courses via specified progression routes. 2015-16 was the first year of our courses being made available to SWAP students. We have since expanded the range of courses available and hope to see many more students enter through this route.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

We encourage applications from prospective students who may not have standard entry qualifications and support the principle of recognising prior learning, whether certificated or experiential, so that students do not need to repeat learning they have already achieved.

Applicants and programme teams are encouraged to promote and use the RPL process widely and there are now more than 400 RPL applications each academic year, using prior formal and informal learning to gain academic credit towards university awards. The process is managed through an RPL Panel which operates with delegated authority from the Exam Board.

School liaison

Our school liaison work is focused on raising aspirations, especially amongst priority groups who are known to be less likely to be progressing to HE, informed by the targets set out within the Strategic Plan and the FE and HE outcome agreements. We work closely with ASPIRE North, a programme within the national Schools for Higher Education Programme, which encourages young people to make more positive and better informed decisions about their post-school educational choices within and beyond our region. Our Regional Schools Group (reporting ultimately to FERB) aims to develop and oversee the delivery of a partnership-wide strategy for increasing the further and higher education curriculum offered to, and utilised by, schools and school pupils within our region, using delivery models appropriate to local needs. A portfolio of new modules, or existing curriculum made more accessible or delivered in collaboration with schools, is being piloted in several areas, and we are evaluating success in terms of uptake and achievement. However, we do not yet have robust data on progression rates, and are developing reporting tools for this.

The regional schools group have been undertaking work to gather case studies which improve gender balance and tackling inequalities. The Academic Partners have received guidance to support their completion. The case studies have a developing the young workforce focus and

a report will be written over the coming months to showcase case studies across the partnership.

Support for Care Leavers

Care experienced students are a priority group the university hopes to increase participation, both through targeted recruitment activity and ongoing support once enrolled. The University has created a Corporate Parenting plan that focuses on the collaborative work taking place across the partnership and the coordination of actions which will encourage care experienced students to apply to the university and enhance the support available to them as our students. Each Academic Partner will have its own individual plan to reflect its distinctive, local context, working in junction with the overarching university plan.

The working group continues to meet to share best practice and offer support to colleagues in meeting the outcomes of the Corporate Parenting plans. A dedicated space has been developed on the student facing pages of the university's website outlining support available.

It is proposed an online training resource be created with EDU detailing what it means to be a corporate parent and the responsibilities attached to this role. Awaiting materials to be released from Who Cares? Scotland so this can be progressed.

Identification of exact numbers of care leavers to provide benchmark data continues to be a challenge and the group has worked with members of the admissions team to try to make it easier for students to disclose and for us to gather more comprehensive data.

Targets:

- **support to Care Leavers in both FE and HE is provided through further development of Care Leavers Group and Corporate Parenting Scheme**

Learners with profound and complex needs

Monitoring of enrolments indicates that there are a very small number of enrolments across the region's colleges (indicated somewhat by enrolments at SCQF Level 1). This data has been considered by the Senior Management Curriculum Team and, although the data has been found to be 'contaminated' by way of erroneous enrolments at SCQF Level 1 that we must endeavour to avoid in the future, the level of profound and complex needs activity is still deemed to unsurprising given that there are estimated to be only 130-160 school leavers across Scotland per year entering this learning group. Meeting these needs is highly specialised and requires colleges to work in partnership with other agencies. Although not necessarily made impossible, the dispersed nature of many of our communities and of some of our colleges makes it more difficult to make this activity sustainable, given the very small number of potential learners and the logistical implications involved. However, we recognise

that, wherever possible, the colleges will be engaged locally in the discussions that take place between the relevant agencies about what is both desirable and achievable for learners with these needs.

Target:

- **evidence how the needs of learners with profound and complex needs are being met**

Learners from different protected characteristic groups

This is being monitored centrally in terms of data gathering and analysed locally, with each of the colleges routinely considering this data and determining what it would wish to do to bring about necessary or desirable changes to the profile of its learners. The data does suggest that it is in respect of gender and disability that there are challenges that need to be faced to bring about greater consistency, with the benefit of regional status being in providing a number of comparators to aid better understanding of the variations that exist. Although these can be aggregated regionally, it is a particular case in point where regional target setting would be of limited value as it is a local level where any changes need to be effected. Gender disparities will be addressed through Academic partner Gender Action Plans.

Targets:

- **increased participation (access, retention and successful completion) of learners from protected characteristics groups**
- **gender disparities within particular subject areas are reduced**

Online counselling service

An online counselling service has been in pilot since 2014, initially within 3 colleges before being rolled out across the university partnership. The online service is offered in addition to face-to-face counselling services currently available in certain academic partners. A number of locations do not have an internal service available therefore, it is anticipated this service will fill this disparity in support and enhance the equivalence of experience offered to students.

Five members of staff (3xPerth College, 1xMoray College, 1xSabhal Mor Ostaig) are currently fully trained in online counselling delivery, and it is anticipated the service will come out of pilot and be fully launched from September 2017. Staff members offer this service as part of their current work remit therefore demand for service will be monitored to ensure it is sustainable and additional training needs kept in consideration.

Support for disabled students

Institutional Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) Accreditation

We are accredited by the Scottish Government to conduct needs assessments with students for the purposes of claiming Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). This enables us to overcome

the barrier of distance and assess students wherever they are based, and we have conducted and quality assured more than 300 needs assessments since achieving accreditation in 2011.

We currently have 14 qualified DSA needs assessors, with more student support practitioners currently in training, and our disability support coordinator can assess students peripatetically as required.

Recent developments include:

- A review of the University's internal DSA referral processes. Documentation has been introduced to assist the University DSA Service in prioritising referrals. This review was also significant because it provided a methodology which has since improved the identification and sharing of best practice amongst University DSA assessors, and enabled staff feedback to be gathered more systematically.
- The further development of the University's Additional Support Online System has assisted the University in collecting data to inform ongoing enhancement of the DSA Service.
- An improved dialogue with the University's Learning Information Services department and the introduction of an assistive technology student web page (<https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/students/support/disability-matters/assistive-technology/assistive-technology>). This online resource can be used by assessors when introducing technologies to students.
- A disability support development day took place in 2016, which included a demonstration of current assistive technologies and an overview of SAAS' DSA evidence requirements.

Targets:

- **facilitate a review of the University's approach to undertaking DSA Assessments by VC, with a view to identifying and sharing best practice amongst disability practitioners.**
- **review periodically as required other aspects of University DSA processes**
- **consider how the response rate to the student survey offered to assessed students might be improved in future years**

Additional Support Online

Our SITS student record system has functionality to manage data relating to students with disclosed additional needs. We have developed a user-friendly web-based interface, to enable these students and relevant staff to access this data more easily. On-demand reports are now available to provide details of specific student requirements on a need-to-know basis,

for example to Exams Officers for implementing exam arrangements. The system also records a student's interactions with support services. Key benefits are the emphasis on students being equal partners and promotion of greater transparency in the provision of student support. Practitioner feedback indicates that the web-based system is more intuitive and user-friendly than working directly with SITS and the implementation of common workflows makes training and support easier for all users, regardless of location.

Target:

- **consider improvement of staff awareness of existing processes**

Student engagement

We seek to engage students from all backgrounds effectively in enhancement of learning and teaching, and we have established multiple mechanisms and processes aimed at ensuring the student voice is embedded within quality assurance and quality enhancement activities (see Section 2). These include formal feedback opportunities through NSS which provides national benchmarking data, as well as other surveys and channels such as the Red Button. We have included additional questions within NSS on learning materials and delivery, to enable us to evaluate impact in terms of student satisfaction trends. A standard online module evaluation survey focussed on learning and teaching has been developed and rolled out, available to all modules. The survey tool, through the pilot phase, is already providing a rich source of data to support evaluation of planned enhancements, and for internal benchmarking.

Postgraduate students are now included in the formal survey mechanisms through our participation in Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES). The results of these surveys is informing practice in a similar way to the NSS.

Student input is a key element in curriculum approval and review activities. In subject and student support service review, the panel meets with student groups to hear views on their learning experience directly, and there is also a student member on the panel. Where feasible, approval and re-approval panels also meet with student groups. We aim to include student representatives on committees and working groups at all levels, including those which inform and direct strategic direction in learning and teaching.

However, it is often through the class representative structure or staff/student liaison groups that students feel their input is most effective, where the feedback loop is relatively quick and direct and enables demonstrable changes to be made. Considerable effort is being undertaken to develop class reps through the formation of a class rep group, and improved training opportunities for reps.

Successive Student Partnership Agreements have included a learning and teaching theme for joint working, enabling the student voice to determine the specific focus. Previous agreements have had specific work strands relating to assessment and learning and teaching. The current agreement has a strand looking at our online learning environments. **Target:**

- **training and support for students is reviewed to ensure that all students regardless of protected background are able to access training and support to engage effectively at all levels of institutional decision making**

Engaging and supporting students in their learning

As an institution, we face unusual challenges in student engagement due to our dispersed structure and blended delivery model. Nevertheless, the theme of 'our students' is central within the Strategic Plan, and we are proactively seeking ways to overcome these challenges, including working in partnership with the student body. We recognise that there are always areas which can be improved, and are not complacent about the challenges we face.

One of the strengths of the university in managing and enhancing the individual student experience is that there are often relatively small numbers of students, allowing the formation of strong relationships with staff who are able to respond to requests and needs of our students. One of the challenges for the university to ensure that there is a consistency of approach and an equivalence of student experience across the university.

There are strong mechanisms and initiatives to help ensure that this happens: including, the horizontal practitioner networks, the student support initiative awards, the effectiveness of the Red Button feedback tool and the development of the Learning and Teaching Academy (LTA). Nevertheless in a complex and highly geographically distributed organisation, equivalence and consistency must be continually sought and reinforced.

Student representation on committees and working groups

University Court and all the academic committees of the university have student membership, as do relevant AP committees. There are also 'class reps' operating at a more local level through programme committees or staff/student liaison groups. Student representation continues to be an extremely valuable aspect of our operations but, like many HEIs, there is patchy take-up, particularly at the level of Faculty Board and Subject Network Committee. This is something we are trying to improve using different approaches tailored to the particular circumstances: for example, in Lews Castle College UHI asked the class reps for volunteers for several college committees, with two people for each committee. This has worked well for some committees: the students felt less intimidated as they had a fellow student present and there was an improved student voice heard in the committees across the college. In Shetland College UHI a poster campaign emphasised the employability advantages of committee work. The Student Engagement Group acts as a useful forum for the dissemination of such approaches.

Student feedback indicated that more could be done to ensure that committee agendas and chairing approaches allow for the student voice and that student members are fully briefed on the remit of the committee. To support this, the Student Engagement Group developed a 'students on committees' protocol in as an induction resource for students, explaining what their role is, the terminology and process employed at meetings, and other information and support available to make a student representative feel able to contribute effectively. As outlined above, the work stream in the SPA on student representation is intended to bring about further improvements in this area.

The Student Support team offers training to students from all backgrounds who are taking part in subject and service reviews, and occasionally supports programme-specific focus groups, as well as taking part in induction and training for new student representatives each year. Training for students on committees is offered as and when required, and an induction template for student committee members, which can be customised for specific committees, is provided. The team worked with Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (SPARQS) in 2015-16 to develop generic training for students wishing to take up representational roles, especially distance learning students who were maybe not able to take advantage of current training opportunities. It is anticipated that this training will further support student engagement, working in partnership with the Highlands and islands Students' Association (HISA).

Target:

- **inclusive support is in place to encourage all students regardless of protected background to understand and engage in the student representation process**

Fostering a sense of belonging

We recognise the challenges faced by students in feeling part of a peer community when the institution is so geographically dispersed. Students consistently tell us how much they appreciate being able to study without leaving their home communities and this often outweighs any disadvantages of not having a traditional university experience. We want each one of our students, wherever they are based, to have a positive university experience, socially as well as academically, and are working with our students to achieve that aspiration. All main campuses offer local opportunities for social interaction, and some campuses have traditional students' association buildings with excellent facilities and resources. We also use technology to facilitate social interaction with other students, through social media or discussion boards within our VLE. The university student newsletter, The Network, is produced monthly during term-time, with news and events, and sent to over 10,000 email addresses.

We increased the level of funding to HISA significantly in 2015-16, in recognition of the potential impact of students' association on social and extra-curricular activity, not least through HISA clubs and societies. We collaborate with students to develop a Student Partnership Agreement, with includes social experience. We aim to offer opportunities to develop interests, engender a sense of belonging to the university, and support the formation

of social relationships. Considerable effort has been devoted to developing clubs and societies, and encouraging them to form so as to be inclusive of dispersed groups of students. The nature of the university means this is an area that requires considerable ongoing effort. HISA is particularly active through their new activities coordinator.

We are building on existing good practice in clubs and societies, Fresher's Fayres and induction, online social engagement, mentoring of students by other students, local events, sports competitions and volunteering opportunities. The annual 'health and wellbeing weeks' have allowed students to participate and organise their own events, whatever their location. We have sought to enable students in more remote locations (who may be studying alone) to interact more with fellow students on their programme of study, and we are making more use of the Blackboard Collaborate system and social media to facilitate contact. A number of subject-focussed societies have been set up, some initiated and led by students, and some by programme teams, for example, in Archaeology and Literature.

Targets:

- **record number of pan-university clubs set up and successful recruitment to these clubs, societies and activities in place across the partnership which create a positive experience for students are identified**
- **activities from across the partnership which have shown to aid social integration of our students are identified**
- **information promoted and disseminated across academic partners for action**

Student feedback

Student surveys and feedback channels

We have reviewed our use of student surveys, addressing a recommendation in ELIR2, to seek more meaningful student engagement through these formal mechanisms. Participation in national surveys (eg National Student Survey, Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, post-graduate Taught Experience Survey) enables us to benchmark performance against comparator institutions. We have adopted a rationalised approach to internal surveys, seeking to avoid over-surveying our students, but continuing to capture rich local data and enable internal benchmarking to drive enhancement (see Section 5). We have recognised the need to improve on systematically closing the feedback loop to students and raising awareness of the actions taken in response to survey outcomes and other quality monitoring processes, through which we routinely gather and produce a wide range of information. While some data are published or reported externally, and many reports are already available internally through committee papers and/or shared folders, there is room for improving its organisation and accessibility, and thereby raising awareness and engagement. We have agreed an approach to the internal publication of quality monitoring information for staff and students, and will work with HISA to publicise this among students. A surveys page has been created in the student support area of the website, informing students about what surveys

they will be asked to complete, what we do with this data, and examples of specific actions taken.

National Student Survey (NSS), Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES)

We have participated in the annual National Student Survey (NSS) since 2013, and took part in the annual Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) for the second time in 2015, having previously used internally-managed survey tools. We took part in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) for the first time in 2016, in recognition that our postgraduate taught students should have an equivalent method of providing feedback. This participation indicates a commitment not only to gather data on student satisfaction and experience, but also to be able to benchmark ourselves at a national level, and set appropriate targets. NSS is one of the CPIs in the Strategic Plan, and our target is to achieve 2% above the Scottish average for 'overall satisfaction' by 2019-20. Both surveys have provided very useful data on our performance within the sector, and improved our ability to analyse areas of comparative strength and weaker aspects of student satisfaction, and triangulate these with other data. As trend data becomes available, we will be able to use NSS, PRES and PTES more effectively as indicators to evaluate the impact of quality enhancement initiatives.

Target:

- **student feedback where gathered by protected characteristic is analysed to determine any under-representation or low scoring by specific groups - where identified, action is taken**

Red Button

The Red Button is a web-based, informal problem resolution and feedback mechanism. Students may use the Red Button to let us know how we are doing, positive or negative, or if they encounter an issue. All comments are read and followed up by the Dean of Students (within 3 working days) to the point of resolution, which might be the problem solved or an explanation of why it cannot be solved. The service is particularly useful for students who may not know who to contact, or may not feel comfortable speaking to a member of staff directly. It is a useful mechanism for ensuring fairness, and provides an accessible route to problem resolution for a wide range of issues, and we are confident that the Red Button is complementing, rather than replacing other feedback channels. Enquiry numbers have increased year on year, but it should be noted that sometimes the same issue is reported by multiple students. The Red Button was highlighted in ELIR2 as an area of positive practice, and it has developed in several aspects since then. A set of service standards is in place to manage user expectations and, following feedback from Quality Managers, quarterly reports are provided to APs and Subject Network leaders, as well as the widely disseminated annual report. The reports detail usage by AP, Subject Network and theme as well as providing anonymised detail of each enquiry and its resolution. The Red Button is highly regarded by

users, and we work to ensure that students know about it, and that it may be useful in their particular circumstances.

Targets:

- **work to ensure that all students are aware of the Red Button**
- **develop a process to record where Red Button issues are ‘equalities’ related to help identify any actions that can be taken to ensure inclusiveness of services etc**

Staff Development

Engaging and supporting staff

Staff engagement and support in the context of learning and teaching is multifaceted and reflects our structure and operational breadth. Our staff base is varied and includes staff who have developed within the university from a further education background as well as those recruited with a more traditional university career profile. Our staff deliver and support teaching in a wide variety of modes and blends ranging from face-to-face to online and block-release to accelerated degrees, and many teach at HE and FE levels, as is appropriate to our tertiary and regional mission. Within the university partnership each AP is a separate employer, and each has its own policies, practices and support mechanisms for staff development. All APs undertake a process of annual professional development review with their staff, aimed at ensuring that they have appropriate skills, qualifications and experience to carry out their assigned role, although the exact format varies, and the content and outcome of the individual reviews remain confidential. Some of the APs report that equalities and inclusiveness is built in to their Professional Development Review process.

Target:

- **to include ‘equalities’ within the PDR process, giving all staff across the partnership an opportunity to discuss how they mainstream equalities within their job role and to have their equalities work recognised.**

In conjunction with the AP-led activities, we have evolved a range of engagement mechanisms which aim to provide appropriate professional development support to all staff, and enable us to act in a ‘joined up’ way in pursuit of our strategic aims. These are being brought together and coordinated through the Learning and Teaching Academy, which aims to:

- provide a framework, practical support and resource for professional development
- provide recognition for staff contribution, reflection and achievement through the HEA-accredited ALPINE scheme
- act as a focal point, source of shared expertise and encouragement for pedagogic research

The LTA’s development has been overseen by the LTA Steering Group, chaired by the Assistant Principal for Curriculum Enhancement, and comprising several members of Quality

Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC), ensuring that its aims and objectives are fully aligned with our strategic enhancement agenda.

There is a wealth of opportunities for staff support and engagement in professional development provided both by APs locally, and through partnership-wide structures and initiatives. Nonetheless, since staff are employed under differing terms and conditions, there are challenges, evident through subject review and annual monitoring, arising from the differing approaches to staff remission from teaching to engage in CPD, scholarship and research and the absence of a standard workload planning model. Reflection on this point at QAEC, the Human Resources Practitioners’ Group (HRPG) and especially the LTA has identified two main areas for development; the need for greater alignment of HR based systems for accessing these opportunities; and a more systematic approach to the identification of professional development requirements. Both of these are recognised in the Strategic Plan and the supporting operational plan.

Targets:

- **improved access to guidance and support/direction/encouragement on equalities is created for staff in relation to teaching practice, student support, quality and policy.**
- **greater alignment of HR based systems for accessing CPD, scholarship and research opportunities**
- **a more systematic approach to the identification of professional development requirements**

Equality and Diversity: Scotinform Staff Survey 2014

The table compares the 2016 survey results with the results from comparable surveys conducted in 2012 and 2014. When viewing these results, it is important to keep in mind that the makeup of colleges taking part in the research differed between 2012, 2014 and 2016.

Staff development - equalities	2012	2014	2016
	Mean* score		
I understand my personal responsibilities for ensuring and promoting equality at work	4.2	4.2	4.2
I have received effective equality training	3.9	3.8	3.9
I know what to do if I am concerned about an equality matter	3.9	3.9	3.9
I am aware of my organisation’s schemes in relation to equalities	3.8	3.8	3.9

*mean scores are based on 1= disagree strongly and 5 = agree strongly

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

As a public sector organisation the University has a duty to demonstrate how consideration of equality is a central aspect of how it operates by recording consideration of equality in a systematic way through undertaking Equality Impact Assessment. This includes publishing

the results of conducted EIAs on the University website. APs are also required to carry out this duty.

The University has recently adopted an EIA online training module which was designed and developed by Perth College in conjunction with the Equality Challenge Unit, to support all staff across the partnership in the implementation of the EIA process.

Target:

- **all staff complete the EIA online training module**
- **EIA built in to all quality processes**

Blended Learning Standards checklist

A Blended Learning Standards checklist has been developed and promoted to all staff. Guidance is given within the document to support the development of 'accessible' materials and the importance of ensuring that all materials and content meet equality requirements ie 'issues should be taught in a way that will not subject students to discrimination or harassment, stereotypes should be challenged and inequality addressed through positive representations of under-represented groups'.

Style Guide

The University Style Guide demonstrates and advises staff on how our communications should be friendly, accessible, clear and consistent. Examples of good practice highlight the difficulties faced by people with dyslexia and those with disabilities who use a screen reader.

Target:

- **all staff are supported to develop accessible materials and inclusive approaches eg through Blended Learning Standards and Style Guide**

Online equalities training

Across the partnership, the majority of staff are accessing online equalities training modules and are encouraged to access external equalities training – mostly through Colleges Development Network (CDN).

Some of the partners also deliver their own in-house equalities training related to staff roles. The majority of partners have identified an action to take forward equalities training for staff, particularly their 'hard to reach' staff eg part-time temporary lecturers.

Equalities Development Days

The University held its first Equalities Development Day in November 2015. All staff across the partnership, regardless of their role, were invited to attend either in person or through Video Conferencing (VC). A range of workshops followed presentations by key speakers. Feedback received was excellent with 50+ staff participating. Many staff requested further equalities training.

A further Equalities Development Day is being held in February 2017 and will take the form of a series of webinars allowing all staff the opportunity to link in online from their own desk.

Target:

- **staff equalities training available across the partnership is collated, evaluated and shared**

PREVENT

The university has a new statutory duty to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. As well as being part of the Higher Education Prevent Working Group, which drew up the guidance for implementation of the duty, we have strong working relationships with Police Scotland through the regional CONTEST Counter-terrorism Board and their own multi-agency Prevent Group. The UHI Prevent Group is chaired by the University Secretary, with representation from every academic partner, specialist posts and the HISA President in attendance. It oversees related work in the areas of staff training, online safety, the management of external speakers and events, the provision of welfare and pastoral support and information sharing.

Specific examples of Prevent-related work have included WRAP training sessions across the university, the development of intranet information for all staff, the hosting of seminars for Police Scotland, the development of an external speakers policy and ensuring that the university is fully compliant with the HE sector Prevent guidance.

Target:

- **to ensure ongoing compliance with the sector guidance on Prevent and integrate the handling of Prevent-related student issues through existing safeguarding procedures across the partnership.**

Staffing

The majority of teaching and learning support staff are employed by the APs, and some by Executive Office. Many teach at both FE and HE level, which enables them to support students effectively in the transition between FE and HE, or from HN to degree. A high proportion of staff hold a teaching qualification, as this is mandatory in the FE sector. However, staff deployment and time allocation can be challenging in the context of the higher class contact hours prevalent in the FE sector, and the different terms and conditions across 14 different employers. We seek to address these through consensus building and agreement on partnership-wide policies relating to staffing and staff development, and through initiatives aimed at developing shared understanding of roles and responsibilities, thereby supporting equivalence.

Across the APs there are a range of initiatives and schemes in place and action planned to support staff from underrepresented groups eg Positive About Disabled People/See Me/Flexible Working. Collating and sharing this information across the partners would prove beneficial in supporting equivalence.

Target:

- **staffing initiatives and schemes for underrepresented groups to be gathered and shared through the Equalities Practitioner Network**
- **where areas of under-representation of pcs are identified – action is taken to address the most pressing**

Equality and Diversity: Scotinform Staff Survey 2012-2016

There was generally a positive response from all partners about equality and diversity in the workplace. Responses to the statements on equality and diversity are reasonably consistent from all partners.

Staffing - equalities	2012	2014	2016
	Mean* score		
I believe that my organisation actively promotes equality of opportunity for all staff	3.7	3.9	3.8
I am treated according to my individual needs	3.8	3.9	3.9

Mean* scores are based on 1= disagree strongly and 5 = agree strongly

Athena SWAN Bronze Award

The University is currently working towards the achievement of an Athena SWAN Bronze Award. The Athena SWAN Bronze university award recognises that the university overall has a solid foundation (the policies, practices, systems, and arrangements) for eliminating gender bias and developing an inclusive culture that values all staff. The University Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Team (SAT) submitted an application for Institutional Bronze Award in November 2016. The results of the panel review will be released in April 2017. If successful, the University will seek to roll-out Departmental Awards. These will be under the new criteria, including non-STEMM areas and covering all University staff.

Target:

- **to achieve the Athena SWAN Bronze Award**

Next steps

This report shows the significant progress already made in integrating the equality duty into our functions across the university as a whole and presents the targets which have informed the development of our Regional Equality Outcomes (see Equality Outcomes Report 2017-2021).

Our approach to equality and diversity is all-encompassing and focuses not just on the need to comply with the wide ranging legislation but also on identifying best sectoral practice and in applying this flexibly across all our services. Our long-term aim is to ensure that equality issues become part of mainstream thinking and delivery.

Evaluating and Reporting

We will continue to consult with our students, staff, stakeholders and members of the communities we serve, on our priorities for our ongoing work on equality, diversity and inclusion and to help with the continued shaping, implementation and mainstreaming of equality within our organisation:

Legislation requires 'listed' organisations to publish an updated report every 2 years and to refresh Equality Outcomes every 4 years. We will therefore publish:

in 2019

- a report showing the progress we have made towards achieving the Equality Outcomes set in 2017
- a report showing how we have further mainstreamed equality across the university partnership

in 2021

- a final report showing the progress we have made towards achieving our Equality Outcomes 2017-2021
- a report showing how we have continued to mainstream equality across the university partnership
- a new set of Equality Outcomes for 2021-2025