

Regional Strategy Committee (RSC)

Tue 14 September 2021, 11:00 - 16:00

By VC (MS Teams)

Attendees

Board members

Alastair MacColl (Chair), Beverly Clubley (Vice Chair), Andrew Campbell, Brian Crichton (Chair Perth College UHI), Angus Campbell, Florence Jansen, Kyle Gee, Todd Walker (- in part)

In attendance

John Kemp, Roger Sendall, Gary Campbell, Donna Heddle, Rosemary McCormack, Lydia Rohmer (- in part), Stuart Smith (- in part), Peter Graham (- in part), Angus Macleod (- in part), Maggie Croft (- in part), Gordon Dyett (- in part), Tony Blow (- in part), Nicholas Oakley (Clerk)

Absent: Sarah Burton, David Sandison, Maggie Tierney, Diana Murray, Robbie Rowantree

Action

Decision

Meeting minutes

1. Welcome

 UHI_Branding Project_Briefing Note_for UHI RSC and Court_September 2021.pdf

1.1. *Welcome & apologies

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the members. Apologies were noted from Sarah Burton, Davie Sandison, Diane Murray, and Maggie Tierney.

The Chair reported that he had requested the Principal and Vice Chancellor, Professor Todd Walker, present a verbal update to the Committee and the attending Academic Partner Principals in relation to recent press coverage following publication of an interview in which Prof Walker had been quoted as referring to a wish to end 'vanity' courses at the University. The Chair noted the presence in the meeting of external participants and asked that the following discussion be treated as confidential.

T Walker thanked the Chair for the opportunity. He reported that the interview had caused a significant media reaction, particularly relating to his use of the term "vanity courses". T Walker stated that his reference to "vanity" courses had been a mistake that he regretted, and that he had since made a public statement apologising, as well as contacting students and staff to apologise. He reported that a stakeholder engagement and communication plan had also been initiated, which included writing to Academic Partner principals, engagement with the CEOs of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Funding Council, The Highland Council, the Chair of the University Foundation, alumni, and letters issued to local MSPs and MPs. He also reported that he had responded individually and personally to enquiries made directly to him.

T Walker reported that he had reflected on the matter and particularly his recognition that the community has a strong sense of interest and pride in the University and its mission, including its course provision, and the communications plan referred to would be built upon this understanding.

The Committee **noted** the update. A member queried why only higher education students and academic staff were referred to in T Walker's communication on the matter to Academic Partner Principals. T Walker reported that he had been previously advised to seek the prior permission of Academic Partner principals before contacting further education students or staff directly employed by the Academic Partner, a process which he had followed in this case. The Committee felt that given the widespread interest and seriousness of the issue that this communications process could and should be overruled in this case.

 RSC Agenda - 14 September 2021.pdf

1.2. *Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

1.3. *Notification of Any Other Competent Business

There were no notifications of any other competent business.

1.4. Visual Identity Workshop

The Chair opened the visual identity workshop. He noted that the project framework had previously been approved by Partnership Council, although some concerns remained that were being resolved through further consultation. He reported that the project was being presented to the Committee for further feedback and endorsement before being presented to Court for approval and sign off.

Lydia Rohmer noted that a full implementation plan would follow and return to Partnership Council. She also thanked Margaret Antonson, Director of Marketing, for her considerable work as the University lead on the project, as well as Alison Lochhead, Head of Communications, who is developing the communications plan.

Tony Blow, Strategy Director at Stand, the external consultancy working on the project, gave members a short presentation on the context and progress of the project.

The Committee heard that the project's objectives were to develop a clear way of describing what UHI is; a way to express UHI's unique structure and offer; and a way for partners to explain their relationship with UHI. The naming strategy had been developed taking these objectives into consideration, with a visual identity system that was flexible enough for all partners to use. The tagline 'UHI is where learning means more' was noted. The Committee were also presented with the new brand marquee and examples of promotional materials, as well as the image strategy for incorporating photography about place (aerial views), subjects and specialisms, and people, into marketing materials. Also covered were proposed colour schemes and Gaelic and bilingual strategies, as well as marketing campaigns and example merchandise. A proposed implementation timeline was presented.

The Committee heard that sessions with individual partners were ongoing to address some outstanding queries and concerns. Stand were also undertaking further workshops with HISA and colleges to provide more detailed engagement and sense check of proposals, as well as with current and prospective students (local and rUK).

The Chair invited comments and feedback on the project as presented. Florence Jansen, HISA President, welcomed the project, stating that it was moving the University in a good direction, and would help address the perceived 'identity crisis' and better express the advantages of the partnership.

The Chair thanked the Stand participants, L Rohmer and her team, and welcomed and noted the endorsement of the project as it moved to the next stage for approval by Court.

[Stuart Smith, Peter Graham, Margaret Antonson, Angus Macleod, Maggie Croft, Gordon Dyett, Tony Blow, Todd Walker, and Lydia Rohmer leave the meeting]

2. Minutes of Meetings

2.1. *Minutes of the meeting held on 4 May 2021

The Committee **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 04 May 2021 as a true and accurate record.

 RSC20-21-56 Minutes_Regional Strategy Committee (RSC)_040521.pdf

2.2. *Matters Arising

The Committee **noted** the matters arising as all complete.

 RSC21-22-01 210908 RSC Matters Arising.pdf

2.3. *Review of Delegated Decisions

The Committee **noted** the matters arising as all complete.

3. Starred Items for Discussion

3.1. *AP Financial Information update

The Committee received an update from Niall McArthur, Director of Corporate Resources, on the Academic Partner Financial information. He reported on the risks identified in the paper, and drew members' particular attention to risks around the Shetland UHI deficit. The Committee noted that the University was actively discussing the situation with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and further actions to mitigate the risks.

The Committee discussed the implications of the Shetland UHI deficit in light of other merger proposals currently being considered by academic partners. John Kemp, Interim Chief Operating Officer, reported that Shetland UHI was a 'non-traditional' merger in that it took significant time and funding arrangements were unusual. He reported that future mergers would be funded in a more traditional way, i.e. the SFC would fund both development as well as implementation costs. He also noted that discussions with SFC about the current proposed merger had already commenced.

The Committee discussed the considerable improvement in deficits reported by the colleges compared to last year, and especially that these improvements were largely the result of additional funding. The Committee agreed that there was still work to be done, and this additional funding or improved financial position should not detract from a focus on and work to improve financial sustainability across the partnership.

The Committee discussed the (relatively) high deficit at Lews Castle College UHI and sought assurances that appropriate action was being taken to mitigate it. J Kemp reported that discussions between his office and the college principal was ongoing to agree plans for deficit management, as well as any further support required from the University during the current academic year. He also reported that the Lews Castle College UHI Board were also finalising their proposed deficit management approach.

The Committee noted that they had concerns about the credit allocation model and particularly the impact on smaller colleges such as Lews Castle College UHI, which seemed to one cause of its deficit. The Committee also sought clarification on whether a proposed institutional element of a revised resource allocation method was within the authority or mandate of the Regional Strategic Body or lay elsewhere (e.g. SFC funding rules or legislation).

Action: J Kemp to clarify and report to RSC on the authority of the Regional Strategic Body around the 'institutional' element of the RAM

The Committee **noted** the update.

 RSC21-22-02 - AP FFR summary report 20-21.pdf

3.2. *SFC Review of Sustainability and Coherent Provision

John Kemp & Niall McArthur

The Committee **noted** a paper and update from J Kemp on the SFC review of sustainability and coherent provision.

 RSC21-22-03 SFC Review paper.pdf

3.3. *Update on recruitment and consideration of changes to FE allocations

John Kemp & Niall McArthur

The Committee received an update on recruitment from J Kemp. In higher education, recruitment to full time non-controlled year one SFC-funded activity had been difficult this year for a variety of reasons including expansion of provision in other universities and the ineligibility of EU students for funding. The executive view is that with the expected decrease in recruitment from new applicants compared to what was achieved last year, meeting the increased funded places target will be difficult. The 2% tolerance level gives some further leeway, particularly for decreases in progression of continuing students. Until a clearer picture emerges on conversion of applicants and continuing student numbers, the 2% tolerance level should be achievable but could be challenging.

In further education, for most partners, applications for FT places (which account for around two thirds of credits, but only a fifth of enrolments) are down. The figures are not final at this stage, but across the region they are down by 11 per cent compared to last year (at time of paper).

The Committee discussed the external causes for the application downturn, including demographics, buoyant local labour market, and the impact of Brexit. The Committee agreed that the university should be supportive of and playing a broader role in economic regeneration in fragile rural and remote areas, and should identify actions to mitigate, and to seek opportunities where applicants have been lost to the labour market that the university provide support around this (e.g. training, apprenticeships) and the need for the university to pivot toward and adapt to this change.

The Committee **noted** the update.

 RSC21-22-04 FE and HE stud figs 20-21 .pdf

3.4. *Change Management Programme/Blueprint

John Kemp & Max Brown

The Committee **noted** the change management programme/ blueprint update.

 RSC21-22-05 140921Blueprint.pdf

4. Unstarred Items

4.1. Performance Dashboard

The Committee **noted** the performance dashboard.

 RSC21-22-06 Dashboard140921.pdf

5. Date of Next Meeting: 4 November 2021

6. Any Other Competent Business

The Chair reported that he was progressing the appointment of a replacement Further Education Regional Lead as a key priority.

The Chair reported that it was his aim to evolve the Regional Strategy Committee to allow it to focus on reviewing and considering key strategic issues, rather than simply endorsing operational or executive reports. To this end, he reported he would be seeking quality presentations from the executive at future meetings and removing where possible areas of duplication. The purpose of the Committee quite is to make informed recommendations to Court to enable better and more informed decision making by Court. The agenda of future meetings would be reviewed to better reflect this priority. This approach was welcomed.

The Committee emphasised that several items on the agenda had several or mixed approval routes through the university's governance and committee structure, particularly the visual identity project and the SFC review, and it was important to clarify roles and responsibilities of the senior non-executive and executive committees and remove duplication wherever possible. The Chair thanked the members for their feedback on the Committee.

There was no other business and the Chair closed the meeting at 12:35.

DRAFT