

Regional Strategy Committee

Thu 04 November 2021, 11:00 - 14:30

By VC Microsoft Teams

Attendees

Board members

Alastair MacColl (Chair), Beverly Clubley (Vice Chair), Andrew Campbell (Chair Argyll College UHI), Angus Campbell (Further Education Regional Lead), Brian Crichton (Chair Perth College UHI), David Sandison (Chair Shetland UHI), Diana Murray (Chair SAMS UHI), Florence Jansen (HISA President), Kyle Gee (HISA Representative), Robbie Rowantree (Chair North Highland College UHI), Stuart Smith (Chair Highland Theological College UHI), Todd Walker (Principal and Vice Chancellor)

In Attendance

Gary Campbell (Vice Principal - Strategic Development), John Kemp (Acting Chief Operating Officer), Lorna Walker (Director HR), Niall McArthur (Director of Corporate Resources), Roger Sendall (Acting University Secretary), Nicholas Oakley (Clerk), Margaret Antonson (- in part), Neil Simco (- in part)

Absent: Donna Heddle

Action

Decision

Meeting minutes

1. WELCOME

 RSC Agenda - 4 November 2021.pdf

1.1. *Welcome & apologies

The Chair opened the meeting. The Chair congratulated Angus Campbell on his appointment as Further Education Regional Lead.

1.2. *Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

1.3. *Notification of Any Other Competent Business

There was no notification of any other competent business.

2. MINUTES OF MEETING

2.1. *Minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2021

The Committee **approved** the minutes of the last meeting held on 14 September 2021 as a true and accurate record.

 RSC21-22-07 Minutes_Regional Strategy Committee (RSC)_140921.pdf

2.2. *Matters Arising

The Committee **noted** that there was one matter arising from the previous meeting around RAM. John Kemp, Acting Chief Operating Officer, reported that he would be seeking a meeting with Brian Crichton, Chair of Perth College UHI, to discuss the matter and would report back on the outcome of their discussion to the Committee.

Action: J Kemp and B Crichton to meet to discuss RAM and report back outcomes to RSC.

 RSC21-22-08 Matters Arising 211028.pdf

2.3. *Review of Delegated Decisions

There were no delegated decisions reported to review.

3. *STARRED ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

3.1. *Regional Outcome Agreement

John Kemp/Margaret
Antonson

[M Antonson joined the meeting]

John Kemp and Margaret Antonson, Director of Marketing and Planning, presented to members on the Regional Outcome Agreement. The Committee heard that the deadline for the report was the end of November.

M Antonson reported that following feedback from Partnership Council the climate change section of the paper would be developed further in order to capture the range of significant activity across the partnership. Partnership Council had also asked that certain sections' language be updated to make them more affirmative and less 'apologetic' for areas outwith the direct control of the university (e.g. environment caused by the Covid-19 pandemic). The Committee members agreed with Partnership Council and sought a more positive, assertive position. They also suggested that issues around national mechanisms and processes, such as the deprivation index SIMD, should be highlighted and narrative provided around the unique challenges the university operates in around rural and remote communities. Finally, they queried whether the outcome agreements would be used in upcoming Education Scotland review meetings with individual partners, and heard that these reviews had only just resumed and were focused primarily on how well colleges were addressing matters relating to the pandemic.

The Committee welcomed and **noted** the report and recognised the efforts of those involved in its production. The paper authors **agreed** to update the draft to reflect the Committee's feedback.

Action: J Kemp and M Antonson to update the Regional Outcome Agreement to reflect RSC's feedback.

[Davie Sandison, Florence Jansen, and Bev Clubley joined the meeting]

 RSC21-22-10 Draft 2021-22 Highlands and Islands regional outcome agreement.pdf

 2021-22 ROA Higher Education Core National Measures.pdf

 21-22 ROA Further Education Core National Measures.pdf

3.1.1. HE/ FE Recruitment

The Chair asked that further and higher education recruitment challenges be discussed as a related item.

Todd Walker, Principal and Vice Chancellor, advised members that Partnership Council had reviewed and discussed recruitment challenges at length the preceding day (03 November 2021) and he updated members on the substantive items from that discussion. This included a discussion on the mechanism for setting credit targets by partners, which was seen by the principals as largely working as intended but requiring fine tuning. Short term actions had already been identified, but that development of a regional strategy for target setting was now required. He advised the Committee that individual partners have their own recruitment strategies but that there was a need for an aggregated and collaborative regional approach to both credit target setting and recruitment strategies, the lack of which he saw as a significant risk and as posing a further challenge to future recruitment. He reported that the curriculum review process and branding project was an important part of the mitigating action but that this was a longer-term solution and short and medium term actions were required in the meantime. T Walker reported that the Partnership Planning Forum (PPF) had been tasked with holding an extraordinary meeting as soon as possible and before the end of the calendar year to develop and implement additional short term actions.

The Committee discussed and **noted** the recruitment challenges. The Committee recognised the demographic challenges, difficult operating environment, as well as the need to maintain provision across the partnership. Members also recognised the importance of clear data and trend analysis to better determine the potential impact of these challenges. The Committee also discussed how different elements of the university's business might necessarily have different dynamics and solutions. For instance, it was noted that the further education curriculum, although potential inward attractors, it was more reliant on -- and sensitive to -- local economic and employment factors as well as aforementioned demographic trends than higher education curriculum.

The Committee discussed the risks represented by failing to achieve recruitment targets and concerns about the potential impacts, including funding to academic partners, and on students. The Committee heard that whilst some mitigation was in place to prevent partners being significantly impacted by any clawback, this was limited to approximately 4,000 unallocated credits, and any clawback beyond this may mean partners' funding would be reduced. The Committee heard that both the mechanism for this and the mitigation of unallocated credits would be a matter for the Regional Strategic Body to determine, but that negotiations with SFC would commence on the matter in the event that short term mitigations identified were ineffective at reducing the credit shortfall.

T Walker reiterated the importance of partners sharing both intelligence and trend analysis as well as recruitment strategies and action plans amongst the partnership to enable an effective and collaborative approach.

Action: The Committee requested that all academic partner chairs ensure that their executives engage with PPF's activities and to share thoughts, plans, and strategies around both further and higher education recruitment.

[M Antonson left the meeting]

3.2. *SFC Review: Government Response

J Kemp provided the Committee with a verbal update on the SFC review government response. He reported that the Committee had previously discussed the SFC review and offered evidence during the consultation process. He noted that the most pertinent issues to the university were around tertiary funding, premiums, how funding for rurality is delivered, national bargaining funding mechanisms, as well as research.

He reported that the next steps were to be proactive, particularly on tertiary funding. The university would also make representations on how the university was operating in a rural region which impacted how it adapted to national bargaining funding schemes, and recognised that the university would need to contribute as a region on the matter.

The Chair invited Todd Walker to reflect on the SFC review. T Walker noted alongside J Kemp's points that he was keen to clarify the issue around multi-year funding and the links with regional outcome agreements; the national impact framework and the metrics arising from this; and intentions on SRUC and UHI funding. He noted that the predominant focus on tertiary represented a strong opportunity for the university partnership to engage with.

The Committee discussed and **noted** the verbal reports. The Committee requested that the university be actively involved and engaged with the SFC and SG on high priority areas. They also urged the executive to continue highlighting areas of strength. For instance, the university partnership's contribution on green/ blue economy were wholly dependent on its assets, including estates and infrastructure, in the region, and there was a strong case to be made on increasing the funding to reflect the university's role in this and other similar areas.

 [Scottish Funding Council Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability - Scottish Government Response Briefing Note - October 2021 FINAL.pdf](#)

 [annex-scottish-governments-response-recommendations.pdf](#)

 [scottish-governments-response-scottish-funding-councils-review-tertiary-education-research-scotland-1.pdf](#)

Verbal Update

John Kemp

4. UNSTARRED ITEMS

4.1. Performance Dashboard

The Committee noted the performance dashboard without further discussion.

John Kemp/Roger Sendall

4.2. Change Management Plan

The Committee noted the change management plan. The Committee requested that future papers be checked to ensure they are up-to-date and providing relevant information. The Chair reported that Court would be receiving a new reporting format on all key projects and if this was endorsed by the Court this reporting format would be extended to future RSC reports too.

Action: Ensure change management plans are up-to-date and adopt new Court reporting format.

 RSC21-22-12 plan update 5, Nov 21.pdf

4.3. Financial Information to Support Blueprint and RAM

The Committee noted the report. J Kemp highlighted to members that further progress on the blueprint was at risk without financial data, and that despite longstanding requests this was still overdue and not forthcoming from seven partners. T Walker reported that all partners had agreed to provide their financial accounts at the outset of the project and that the lack of engagement was both disappointing and represented a significant risk to the development and implementation of the blueprint. As such the chairs of the boards of the seven partners would be contacted to seek an explanation and solution.

The Committee recorded its support for the proposed action to contact board chairs on the matter.

 RSC21-22-13 Financial Info to support Blueprint & RAM.pdf

4.4. *Gaelic Language Plan

Neil Simco

[Moved from item 3.1]

[Neil Simco joined the meeting]

Neil Simco, Vice Principal Research and Impact, presented on the Gaelic Language Plan. He reported that Partnership Council had reviewed and endorsed the current iteration the previous day (03 November 2021) and that their feedback would be incorporated before the plan would enter public consultation. Neil Simco reported on the highlights and context of the Gaelic Language Plan, and invited the Committee's feedback.

The Committee asked how efforts for integrating Gaelic across the partnership were represented in the plan. Neil Simco reported that this would be done through a variety of measures, including short courses, Gaelic awareness and staff development, online courses, and highlighting the availability of Gaelic modules.

The Committee queried whether the university had the appropriate level of resourcing to support the plan. Neil Simco reported that future iterations of the draft would include targets and more specific information about resourcing, and that resourcing would likely come from a number of areas, including recurrent course funding, via partnership projects funded by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and university core funding for staff and staff development.

The Committee acknowledged the significant amount of work and welcomed the cohesive and structured approach of the plan.

 RSC21-22-09 Gaelic Language Plan.pdf

 RSC21-22-09 Gaelic Plan Development key dates.pdf

5. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

There was no other business and the Chair closed the meeting at 12:50.