Outcome Grant Considerations

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Context

The University of the Highlands and Islands has a remit which includes a commitment to applied research and innovation of direct relevance to employers and society, which will support the development of a knowledge based economy within the Highlands and Islands, underpinned by locally based, internationally recognised, research excellence. This acknowledges the special nature of the Highlands and Islands, in which economic development must accommodate historical and geographic challenges and opportunities.

The University believes that Scotland’s economic ambitions are served by supporting economic activity at a regional, national and international level and that this should be done, whenever appropriate, in partnership with academic colleagues across Scotland and internationally. This is highlighted by the strategic plan¹ which includes as central principles “The University of the Region” and “Focused Research”, both of which encompass assumptions of two way exchange of knowledge with client sectors.

In terms of the ambitions identified as being led by the University sector in the Innovation Scotland Action Plan, the University priorities are:

Promotion of Entrepreneurial Opportunities to Students

The University will engage with Scotland wide programmes, such as Converse Challenge, the Scottish Institute for Enterprise, the Enterprise Campus and Enterprise Fellowship schemes to identify and implement programmes to encourage student involvement and initiation of wealth creating activities. It is intended that the existing CREATE² project run from Inverness College UHI will inform the development of parallel structures forming an innovation network across the UHI partnership, involving academics and industrial stakeholders and will include involvement from institutions across Scotland. The ambition is to inspire, encourage and support students, staff and the business community to develop the knowledge, skills and motivation they need to realise their potential through enterprise. This will involve the identification of appropriately skilled individuals across the University, ensuring that discipline and regional coverage is achieved. It will also involve the effective engagement of senior staff to ensure effective prioritisation within local plans.

The UHI involvement will continue to concentrate on the challenges of entrepreneurship in diverse communities, in which remoteness and communications can be challenging. It will also involve provision of support for students to be involved in Scotland-wide ventures and will include steps to generate a “virtual academy” of entrepreneurship to allow access to expertise outside of the region,
including support for virtual entrepreneurship workshops. These ventures will consider such issues as enhanced participation in Enterprise Fellowship schemes, placement opportunities, including international and “virtual placements”.

In parallel with the expansion of the UHI innovation network, all educational programmes, will incorporate business development and entrepreneurship within their curricula, with progress considered by programme boards. The University is keen that this will involve the sharing of best practice across the sector, while ensuring that provision is appropriate for the needs of the Highlands and Islands.

The University is anticipating the provision of externally funded doctoral studentships, the aims of which are aligned with the key economic development sectors within Scotland and, in particular, the Highlands and Islands. These students will have academic supervisors drawn from the University sector, with advisors from the economic sectors themselves. Innovation and entrepreneurship will form key elements of their training. It is anticipated that Universities based outside of the region will also provide supervision and take key roles in this venture.

**Increasing development opportunities for, and uptake of, entrepreneurial training and education, and developing practitioner-led entrepreneurial training.**

The University Management School will work with the Educational Development Unit to identify appropriate measures and training options available internally and from elsewhere in Scotland. This will also involve the identification of a network of entrepreneurs from within and without the region, who will work as visiting staff and act as “entrepreneurs in residence” associated with educational programmes, faculties and staff. This network will advise on the development of additional programmes, where they are not available internally. Ideally, such development will be in association with academic and industrial partners. As with the student opportunities, the CREATE inspired innovation network can ensure that opportunities are made in line with the needs and demands of the economic sectors and the needs of the institution. External entrepreneurs and specialists from other Scottish institutions will be invited to participate as delivery AND receiving partners, where appropriate.

**Encouraging mobility of staff between business and universities.**

The University will hold knowledge transfer workshops with external stakeholders to identify opportunities for engagement and opportunities for 2-way staff exchanges with industry. Such exchanges will require training for both the internal and external mobility (including international exchanges), to maximise the learning and productivity opportunities.

Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP) represent a parallel opportunity and the University will expand support for staff and external stakeholders to ensure effective engagement, including active involvement with the Scotland-wide KTP structures. The existing internal knowledge transfer
networks will be further integrated into the research clusters, which form the principal operational units responsible for delivering the University’s research ambitions, to ensure that key staff are familiar with the best available capabilities within the University. External industrialists will be invited to join the cluster structures to further enhance the communications between research and their client sectors. The University will also expand the involvement of representatives in key economic sectors in its advisory structures.

Mobility will be particularly encouraged for early career researchers, PhD students and mid-career researchers, whose activity is seen to be particularly aligned with economic development. Industrial stakeholders will be encouraged to access staff supported facilities and equipment housed within the University in furtherance of their development. This is a particular opportunity for SMEs in remote and areas within and out with Scotland!

**Professional development available to University Enterprise & Innovation officers**

The University will work with other institutions in Scotland to identify and implement internal and external training opportunities for professional staff, including supporting access to Praxis Unico courses. It will also support applications for registration/accreditations with the ATTP, including provision of the associated CPD.

The University also wishes to implement opportunities for key professional staff to be placed in external Technology Transfer offices to gain experience in specific IP/licensing issues and other appropriate specialisms. This should be in parallel with opportunities for staff in other Scottish HEIs to gain experience in the UHI environment. The enterprise campus model offers an example of appropriate practice.

**Enhancing skills for effective collaboration within the academic and SME business base**

The University will continue its drive to establish training and staff development for its own staff and the staff of clients to ensure they have an effective University/Business perspective. This will be in both directions, involving consideration of what business does and what a university does! It will include support to understand AND experience both perspectives, including the Highlands and Islands specific remote and rural aspects. Such training will allow the University and its clients to more effectively interact in the development of new joint ventures. Again the existing CREATE network is a model, having established Catalyst³, which provides innovative support and tailored training to small businesses and sole traders and its principles will be expanded across the region through the innovation network.

The remote and rural aspect of these ventures is particularly significant in terms of the Highlands and Islands and must accommodate the dominance of SMEs and microbusinesses within the economic landscape.
Establishment of an ongoing self-critical and adaptive analysis of existing processes, acknowledging the local and regional diversity.

The University will assess approaches to improve the synergy between academia and wealth creating sectors within the Highlands and Islands and similar economic environments. This will involve external stakeholders and partnerships with other Scottish academic institutions to provide confidence and conformity of practice and assessment. One option to be explored will be the establishment of regional “cross cutting” structures working across and in partnership with the national innovation centres, involving an extension of existing “Key Account” processes on a regional and sectoral basis.

Enhancement of contractual processes to encourage effective University/Business engagement

The University is working to implement enhanced templates for contract arrangements for SME’s in line with other Scottish institutions, including “post-project referral protocols”. These will be adaptive and subject to regular reassessment as further operational experience is gained.

Assessment of the Economic Benefit of Knowledge Exchange with “non-profit” sectors

It is acknowledged that the outcome grant processes are associated with visible economic benefit but it is important that it is acknowledged that there is an economic effect arising from involvement with social enterprises, charities and churches. This is especially true of our remote, rural and fragile communities, where social enterprises can play a critical role in maintaining employment and enabling the sustainability of communities. The University will work with these enterprises to assess the economic benefit of such engagements. Such consideration will also include economic sectors which are seen as being economically marginal and focussed on sustainability rather than economic growth. This will involve the development and consideration of alternative models of economic assessment.

Support for SMEs on a Global Scale

The University intends to work with SMEs which are traditionally focussed on local scale activities, who will benefit from engagement with alternative markets, often collaborating with non-competing enterprises overseas. This will involve the University involving SME stakeholders with educational and research networks at an advisory level, giving access to the expertise within those networks. This will involve establishing a network of “Friends of the University” across European and International boundaries. The network will facilitate workshops and staff exchanges as discussed earlier in the document.

The University of the Highlands and Islands: University Innovation Fund (UIF)

2: https://www.inverness.uhi.ac.uk/business-and-training/create
3: www.createhighland.com/catalyst.aspx